

Cultural and Spiritual Ministry Needs of Believers of Muslim Background in North American Churches

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Cultural and Spiritual Ministry Needs of Believers of Muslim Background in North American Churches

Chapter 1: Introduction

A. Shifting Paradigms

Since arriving in West Africa in 1986 to minister amongst Muslim peoples, I have witnessed three major paradigm shifts in missional outreach. A very brief examination of the changes will give a clearer understanding of the challenge facing the North American church. An understanding of past efforts is essential for giving us hints in our own missionary obedience.¹ Mission endeavors from the days of William Carey were for the most part outsourced to those who sensed a particular call of God to minister in distant places. As late as 1986, many field personnel were still living on what was referred to as compounds. Often, at least two or more single-family homes were grouped together with a wall eight to ten feet tall surrounding the dwellings and grounds providing the workers a sense of security and ease in mini re-creations of America. Workers left those compounds to cross cultural and linguistic barriers to meet the spiritual and physical needs of the people surrounding them. However, unaware of and limited by the script of their own cultural values, they left a negative impression on the non-Western church. Soong-Chan Rah states, "In the history of world missions one of the most significant concerns is the paternalism and cultural insensitivity that may

¹ Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 22.

be a part of the missionary enterprise.”² It is only fair to note that regardless of this negative impression, the work of workers from the West bore fruit. As a result of God’s working through their endeavors, today only about 36% of the world’s missionary force is sent out from North America and only about 11% from Europe. The rest (53%) are coming from Asia, Africa, and South America.³

The introduction of the concept of unreached people groups by Dr. Ralph Winter in 1974 at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland revitalized a rather sluggish missions movement refocusing its strategy and vision. Crossing cultural and linguistic barriers were rediscovered as essential to the task as crossing geographical barriers. Moreover, as peoples throughout the world were identified, geographical boundaries blurred. Ethnic people groups were no longer confined to a particular place, but were dispersed across the globe due to migration. The implication of such dispersion was defining strategies that were effective regardless of the geographical location of a particular people.

² Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Captivity*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009) 129.

³ Justin Long, “The State of the Gospel,” *Momentum Magazine*, November/December 2006, www.momentum-mag.org, p. 49. These statistics were compiled by Jason Mandryk and Justin Long from databases maintained by Operation World and the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, the latter published in the Annual Status of Global Mission in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research. It should be noted that statistics in the recent *Atlas of Global Christianity* by Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross would demonstrate that 33% percent of the missionary force comes from North America, 33% from Europe, and the remaining from other parts of the world. However, these numbers reflect workers from many different sending bodies i.e. Catholic, Mormon, etc. not just evangelical. See *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, ed.s, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p. 261.

By the end of the twentieth century strategies of cultural adaptation and language acquisition were again in need of re-evaluation.⁴ People that missionaries had been reaching across the ocean were now in the airports, shopping malls, and schools of America. Technology and transportation had not just dispersed peoples, but had effectively intermingled them to such a point that to minister effectively in one urban area, multiple languages and cultures needed to be studied and acquired. Today, even in the smallest of towns in North America, it is not uncommon to meet those of different ethnicities. A new skill of cultural sensitivity rather than full cultural acquisition is needed. Cross-cultural workers are not the only ones in need of these skills. Any leader or congregation who desires to build relationships with those of other ethnic backgrounds will be in need of these skills. The mission field in just twenty years has been turned upside down as Richard Bailey of Christar explained in 2001. Bailey outlined five ideas that had changed in missions as a result of what may be the greatest migration in history. Missions is now about people, not geography. Missions is now about people groups wherever in the world they live, not about geopolitical countries. Missions is about going to another culture, not another country. As cultural and linguistic proximity not geographical proximity determine accessibility to the gospel, the need in North America is significant. A people can be reached by living among them whether in their heartland or amongst the Diaspora.⁵ While Bailey

⁴ This paper does not deal with identifying ethnic people groups. However it should be noted that this aspect of the strategy in the Lausanne movement has also become more complicated as the number of multi-cultural families increase creating a new unique people of 'third culture kids.'

⁵ Richard Bailey, "Who's Turning the Mission Field Upside Down?", *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*, 37 no. 1, January 2001, 52-53.

does address the implication of these shifts upon sending of personnel, he does not address the implication upon the North American church.

Paul Martindale of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary outlines the need for mobilizing the church in North America.

According to a Zwemer Institute report there are about one hundred and sixty trained cross-cultural workers engaged in full-time ministries to the Muslims of North America. (Zwemer Institute, All Workers Report, (Fort Wayne, IN: Zwemer Institute, unpublished report, October 2001), 1.) If each of these workers were to have contact with ten Muslims per week they would be able to contact 83,200 Muslims per year and it would take 84 years to reach 7 million Muslims with just one initial exposure or contact with the gospel. Those of us who work with Muslims know that it takes many exposures to the gospel over a number of years for a Muslim to be convinced and to begin following Christ... In light of this context we must conceive a workable ministry strategy for reaching the Muslims in the United States which does not depend upon a small number of cross-cultural workers.⁶

Martindale points out there are organizations addressing this need. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has had an Internationals Team with multiple units focused on work amongst the Muslim Diaspora since 1999. In 2006 a unit was assigned to work with churches in North America to equip them for the charge.

Needs of workers, churches, and the Diaspora change continually as globalization grows increasingly complex. Muslims are responding to the call only to discover that the church in North America entrenched in Western culture is not a welcoming place. Skills in cultural sensitivity are essential for anyone in the faith community involved in discipling, nurturing, or simply fellowshiping with believ-

⁶ Paul Martindale, "The Diaspora Muslims in North America", Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Unpublished paper, 2003, 19-20.

ers of Muslim background (BMB)⁷ in order for the BMB to garner necessary support to follow through on their faith decision. The challenge is not eradicate culture, but to maximize potential by affirming positive values and to synthesize those values under the plumb line of God's Word in order that a united body might glorify God.⁸

B. Problem Statement

Until recent years missionaries have been the eyes and ears for North American churches to distant lands and peoples. Churches served the missionary and did not engage directly in missional endeavors, thereby acquiring only minimal cross cultural skills. It is only in recent years as migration has become a major feature of the 21st century that unique skills involving compassion and sensitivity have been required in order for North American church to seize this undeniable opportunity for evangelization in her own 'Jerusalem'.⁹ These skills are essential to the church if she is to be a welcoming place and if she is to provide true fellowship and sense of belonging to BMB's. This project will examine what sorts of faith communities BMB's in North America integrate into, the challenges of finding and integrating into that faith community, challenges of cross cultural

⁷ Donald Little in his thesis "Fruitful Approaches to the Discipleship of Believers of Muslim Background" explained his preference for the acronym "BMB over MBB (Muslim Background Believer) because of the emphasis on believer rather than Muslim. Though I have not heard this acronym used but only rarely, I concur with Little's assessment and will follow suit in this document.

⁸ Christopher Epp made this statement in reference to multicultural teams at work on the field. The same sort of synthesizing should occur as BMB's join in the life of North American churches. "The Multicultural Team, Money, and the Glory of God." *Momentum Magazine*, November/December 2006, www.momentum-mag.org, p. 12.

⁹ Samuel Escobar, "Mission Fields on the Move", *Christianity Today* Vol. 54, no. 3, May 2010, 29.

leadership, and those cultural mores guarded regardless of integration into another culture.

C. Purpose

In identifying and examining the aforementioned characteristics, this project will accomplish two purposes. Firstly, to provide for churches here in North America engaged with BMB's a resource for identifying and addressing cultural sensitivity needs within their leadership and congregation. This provides for the BMB not only a place of belonging, but a place where effective discipleship, community, and leadership can occur. Secondly, as the center of evangelicalism is moving to the Southern and Eastern hemisphere, the role of the Western church and her missionaries has changed to one of full and equal partnership with our brothers and sisters from other parts of the world. As our BMB brothers and sisters in North America realize their own callings and leadership skills, they will naturally lead out in cross cultural ministry. The same shift to full and equal partnership should occur between North American churches and these BMB leaders. As Samuel Escobar notes globalization has ushered in a new interdependence of daily lives and collective fates, creating a larger common horizon of experience.¹⁰ In fact this new 'mission at our doorstep' provides a training ground for new partnerships with the potential of creating new models of missionary obedience for the institutionalized and predictable Western church.¹¹ This resource is intended to help North American churches prepare for engage effectively in these new

¹⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹¹ Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 20-22.

models by minimizing cultural clashes, thus enriching their own Christian experience and increasing the possibility of practices that will be fruitful.

Chapter 2: An Examination of Worldviews

A. Communitarianism (or Collectivism) versus Individualism

A person from a collectivist culture will value the group above the individual. Their function in society and their identity will come from the group. They will respect the family first, then the larger group such as a tribe. Decisions will be made in consensus based on the desire of the group and the greater good for the group. Accountability is to the group. For this culture it is not all about me; rather it is about us. Power and strength are found in a cohesive group. Success is everyone's success and failure reflects on all.

A person from an individualistic culture will value the autonomy of the individual. They will determine who they are and how they function. Decisions and personal goals are based on what is best for the individual even if it may not be appreciated or desired by the group. One is accountable only to one's self. Individualistic cultures will value personal strength and ability to overcome before expecting or desiring the groups' interjection into a given situation. One's failure is one's own.

Multiple proverbs express the value of collectivism. A Middle Eastern proverb states, "Me against my brother; my brother and I against my cousin; my brother, my cousin and I against the boy in the next village." Similarly a Persian proverb states, "Even an enemy who is one of us, is more of a friend than a stranger." But collectivism goes beyond defining loyalties. A person defines who he is only in

relation to the communities he identifies with. "I am because we are."¹² One's very existence and identity is dependent upon connectedness to the group. Expressions such as "God helps those who help themselves", "You have made your bed, now lay in it" or "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps" reflect the individualist's assumption of right to self and power within the self, even to the point of owning failure.

In order to better understand the BMB's collectivist world view, the dominating concept of *ummah* in Muslim society must be examined. The word technically denotes a people, tribe, or nation.¹³ In the world of Islam the full concept of *ummah* goes beyond simple identification. *Ummah* dictates the priority of human relationships. Religion is the tie that cannot be broken above even tribal or blood kinship.¹⁴ Welfare of the Muslim society and the responsibility of one to another are above all other relationship priorities.¹⁵ With *ummah* Muslims need not fear isolation.¹⁶ *Ummah* provides solidarity and safety; solidarity in thought and practice and safety in time of need as there is a close knit community to rely upon. One of the hadiths¹⁷ regarding the Prophet Mohammed explains the essence of *ummah*: The Prophet said, "A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts reinforce each other." The Prophet then clasped his hands

¹² Ibid., 140.

¹³ Thomas Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding Version 2.0*, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 663.

¹⁴ George W. Braswell, Jr., *What You Need to Know About Islam & Muslims*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996) 14.

¹⁵ John Gilchrist, *The Qur'an: The Scripture of Islam*, in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding Version 2.0*, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 3926.

¹⁶ Phil Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque: Christians Within Muslim Community*, in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding Version 2.0*, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 6692.

¹⁷ A hadith is a tradition of a saying or action of the prophet Mohammed.

with the fingers interlaced (while saying that) (3:374; 43.6.626).¹⁸ This cohesiveness and need to be closely connected to a group may well be difficult for someone from an individualistic culture to even discern, much less intentionally address.

B. Shame versus Guilt

Cultural mores of shame and guilt tie in closely with the ideas of collectivism and individualism. Shame based cultures which includes approximately two thirds of the world and thus most countries of origin for BMB's, will conform their behavior based on external pressures from the community, from the small family unit, to the religious community, to the larger societal community. Expectations of the community are clear. When expectations fall short, the group is culpable and bears the shame of the failure. Since the community is responsible for each other, when one fails, all fail. The approval of the group is of greatest importance. It is not so much whether or not something has or has not been done rightly or wrongly or even about morality, but whether one has gained the approval of the group.¹⁹ To bring shame upon another is the highest of offenses and relationships are fractured.²⁰ It is avoided at all costs, even if it means telling a lie. It is not only the failure that is terrible, but the person is inferior or is a 'bad' person. Duane Elmer in *Cross Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting In Around the World* links the way of thinking to the collectivism that usually goes hand in

¹⁸ Phil Parshall, *Inside the Community: Understanding Muslims Through Their Traditions*, in World of Islam Resources for Understanding Version 2.0, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 7030.

¹⁹ Duane Elmer, *Cross Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting In Around the World*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 172- 173.

²⁰ Ibid., 175.

hand with shame based cultures. People from these cultures think holistically.²¹ It is not about me, but about us. Thus one's actions and decisions have collective consequence. It should be noted that one of the greatest shames that can be brought to a group is for one of its members to leave Islam. One has not only chosen an inferior religious path, but it indicates independent reflection and decision that goes against the group's status, goals, and established order.²² Bill Musk in *Touching the Soul of Islam* points out that what counts at all costs is loyalty and maintaining the relationship.²³

Most North Americans tend to be from a guilt based culture.²⁴ Right is right and wrong is wrong. There is an internal "conscience" that directs the individual to certain courses of action. Guilt based cultures tend to be cultures that are individualistic. The individual alone bears culpability. At the same time, it is the action that is wrong. It does not indicate the person is wrong.

The issue of shame versus guilt plays an important part in how Muslims and Christians will view the issue of sin. For a Muslim, humanity is born essentially good. Adam and Eve in the garden simply made a mistake. Humanity is forgetful and forgets God's commands and so sometimes do things that are wrong. One must simply ask for forgiveness and try to do better. Much worse than committing

²¹ Ibid., 176.

²² Greg Livingstone, *Planting in Muslim Cities: A Team Approach*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993) 15.

²³ Bill Musk, *Touching the Soul of Islam*, in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding Version 2.0*, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 6636.

²⁴ Dr. Paul Martindale pointed out during advisement changes occurring in North American society as younger generations are moving in the direction of shame-based cultures as well as the number of first and second generation immigrants also from shame-based cultures now calling North America home. This dynamic will be one which workers will want to watch closely for implications it will have on ministry to North Americans themselves.

an error is permitting that error to dishonor relationships, society, or religion. Above all one must honor the relationships and systems in society as prescribed. For Christians, humanity lives in a state of fallenness and has a sinful nature. An inherent knowledge of good and evil pricks the conscience and makes one aware of a state of guilt. This guilt must be reconciled in order to enter into relationship with a Holy God. The concept of guilt causes things to be defined in terms of right or wrong rather than honor or shame. One must do the 'right thing' above all else, even if in some way it causes someone to 'lose face.'²⁵ Shame versus guilt when not understood may lead to false assumptions and judgments by North Americans and BMB's alike.

C. Relationship versus Task Orientation

Hospitality is integral to the societies of the majority of BMB's. To many Muslims it is a "sacred obligation."²⁶ It demonstrates the importance of relationship over task. As the concept of shame, this coincides with societies that place a high importance on collectivism or the group. Relationship oriented cultures value relationship on its own basis, not for what can be gained from it. There will be less emphasis on a task that needs to be completed especially if accomplishing the task competes with extending companionship. Relationship oriented cultures will demonstrate gifts of hospitality both formally and informally, whether it is taking a moment to go through a long series of greetings to someone encountered

²⁵ For more on shame and honor in an Islamic worldview and a Christian worldview see Roland Muller's book *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door*, (Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris Corp, 2000).

²⁶ Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding Version 2.0*, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 2993.

on the street or treating invited guests as royalty at a meal. Worth of the relationship and honoring the relationship gives a sense of identity and connectedness.

For task oriented cultures, time is money. To lose time or waste time is to squander a valuable commodity. The relationship is more instrumental in purpose and not entered into for its own sake.²⁷ In cultures where task is valued, individuals gain a sense of worth by a job well done and goals that have been accomplished. North Americans need a basic understanding of task versus relationship in order to not only avoid frustration, but to maximize the relationship skills of BMB's.

D. Diffuse versus Specific

The expression "saving face" is one way to describe a diffuse culture. Those from a diffuse culture will be concerned about "airing dirty laundry," about being overly direct in criticism or direction, and about asking questions that are too personal. In the outside world before engaging in work or ministry, a person from a diffuse culture will want to develop a relationship. It is not a simple cut and dry project. To engage together is to be involved with one another. This requires getting to know each other and spending time on the "niceties" of the relationship before moving ahead with the project at hand. A question too personal or too direct causes one to lose face and will at times elicit a response that is not necessarily accurate or the truth. A person from a diffuse culture has very little that is

²⁷ Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Global Business* 2nd Ed, (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1998) 135.

considered public space.²⁸ BMB's quite often are from diffuse cultures. The importance of being welcomed into personal space is explained by Roland Muller in an article on Nabataean culture through the tradition of the three cups of coffee. The first cup of coffee represents peace between the individuals. The second cup represents friendship. The third cup represents willingness to stand by each other and uphold each other's honor.²⁹ A tradition amongst Arab chiefs requires a welcoming a guest for three days before asking his name or purpose of his visit.³⁰

Most North Americans are from a specific culture.³¹ There is very little private space and it is clearly separated from other parts of life. Specific cultures are very friendly and open, but that does not indicate any sort of real depth or bonding in the relationship. As one BMB states it, "Americans are very friendly, but they do not make good friends."³² Because so little of their space is considered off limits and personal, they will be direct and will tend to get right down to business. In a specific culture, one in a business relationship will see little need for that relationship to diffuse over into something personal. North Americans would do well to learn the importance of a 'cup of tea' and taking time for the pleasantries before 'getting down to business' with their BMB brothers and sisters.

²⁸ Ibid., 84.

²⁹ Roland Muller, "Honor and Shame in a Middle Easter Setting", 2002, *Nabataean Culture & Religion*, (Nabateaa Net: <http://nabataea.net/h&s.html>, 2002).

³⁰ Charis Waddy, *The Muslim Mind*, (New York, NY: Longman Group Limited, 1982) 58.

³¹ Exceptions to this generality would be groups such as the Amish for example or small farming communities and towns.

³² J. A., *Interview by author*, May 6, 2010.

E. Fatalism versus Free-will

The last five areas that will be examined deal with juxtapositions of various teachings between Islamic values and Christianity. Intrinsic to the nature of Islam is the idea of fatalism, the perception by an individual's that it is not possible to control one's future. This idea of fate in Islam goes beyond the Christian idea of predestination, because God is in control and wills all that is good or bad. It proposes that man has no power over his will, but has control over his responsibilities, even though they too are willed by God.³³ Thus everything in an individual's life is the will of God and devoted followers should simply submit and never question.³⁴ Quoting Kim Gustafson in his book, *The Cross and the Crescent*, Phil Parshall explains that while this can lead to a sense of peace and contentment with the status quo, it also leads to a pessimism and passivity which results in a lack of confidence to change, progress, or value. It can cause the individual to not own personal failures, mistakes, or shortcomings.³⁵ Indeed, it is God who causes someone to go astray.³⁶ It should be noted that while many Muslims have a fatalistic outlook, some maintain there is limited freedom of choice. God does not make someone do something bad, rather he is the creator of the laws that govern the cause and effect of good and evil.³⁷ This cause and effect should lead one to do good as good works will produce good results. There is limited

³³ Keith E. Swartley, ed., *Encountering the World of Islam*, (Atlanta; London; Hyderabad: Authentic Media, 2005) 144.

³⁴ Phil Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent: Understanding the Muslim mind and heart*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.1989) 96.

³⁵ Ibid. 97.

³⁶ Verses in the Qur'an addressing this are Surah 2:26, 6:126, 7:155, 81: 27-29

³⁷ George W. Braswell, Jr., *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996) 57.

freedom of action but results are controlled by the laws of God.³⁸ While free-will exists in Islam, it is not exercised with the same impetus. The incentive to freely choose to do good is to achieve desired results. When the desired results do not come to pass, one can assume that one has chosen poorly, even if attempting to do correctly. Even if one consistently chooses well and in general achieves the desired end, ultimately the fate of eternity still is completely up to God.

The crucial difference in Christianity is that fate or predestination is not concerned so much with attempting to achieve deserved results while here on earth, but with eternity in the presence of God. The emphasis is not on humanity submitting and bending to laws that God has created, rather it is focused on the idea that God has bound himself in salvific covenant with humanity.³⁹ Humanity has the freedom to choose to enter into this covenant. When doing so, the desired result is not only concerned with correct action, but with transformation of character i.e correct attitude, correct thinking, correct outlook, etc. While in Islam free-will is closely connected to the idea of justice, in Christianity the salvific covenant with God means that undeserving humanity is justified freely. Therefore Christianity offers the aspect of hope missing in Islam. Nevertheless, a lack of understanding regarding the Muslim fatalistic world view can hinder North American believers in communicating reconciliation and justification effectively.

³⁸ Ibid. 57.

³⁹ Jens Christensen, *The practical approach to Muslims*, in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding* Version 2.0, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 10023.

F. Path of Knowledge and Wisdom versus Love

Dr. Waleed El Ansari, religion professor at the University of South Carolina, stated in an interview that there are three paths to sanctification i.e. knowledge, love, and action, with knowledge being the highest of paths and action the lower. Islam rather than a path of action is the path of knowledge.⁴⁰ This knowledge encompasses numerous disciplines: metaphysics, philosophy, physics, mathematics, *sharia* or law, sciences, etc. All of life is under the control of an all powerful creator and this creator is the cause of everything that happens i.e. vertical causality. The sanctifying paths of love and action are horizontal causality and therefore less noble paths. With vertical causality, many Muslims experience fear. Fear that God will strike. Fear that if God does not strike then those in the spirit world will. God, creator of the spirit world, permits it to wreak havoc in the life of the follower. Dr. Sam Solomon of ELAM ministries in the United Kingdom, an Islamic lawyer and a believer from Muslim background, contends that this underlying element of vertical causality leads to a life of fear and foreboding for the average Muslim. They are fearful of the various spirits that may do harm and of the finger of God that may bring about some unwelcome event.⁴¹ The good Muslim must relentlessly be on their guard while constantly striving for higher knowledge and understanding. This ties in as well with the idea of fatalism. Proper know-

⁴⁰ Waleed El-Ansary, *Interview by author*, October 26, 2006.

⁴¹ Sam Solomon, a BMB and former Sharia lawyer, at the time was an instructor at ELAM ministries in Godalming, Surrey, UK. The author studied for a few weeks under Solomon's instruction July 1998.

ledge is essential in order to insure the desired results of a decision and avoid any evil consequences.⁴²

It is certainly accurate that an overarching component in the Christian faith is love as the apostle Paul clearly delineates in 1 Corinthians 13. Jesus advocated love of God and neighbor leading to tangible evidence and appropriate action as in the parable of the Good Samaritan. However, Jesus' sermon recorded in the gospel of Matthew addresses knowledge, love, and action. To listen to Jesus' words and put them into practice is wise (Matthew 5:24-27). Love is evidence of the spirit of God (Galatians 5:22). Contrarily knowledge is a gift that is bestowed by the Holy Spirit and not all believers have it in the same measure, as is the nature of gifting (1 Corinthians 12:8). Paul calls believers to knowledge that will help believers instruct one another (Romans 15:4), as well as a correct knowledge of God and his righteousness (Romans 1:28 and 10:2). He also notes that knowledge alone can be negative as it can cause the follower to become puffed up, whereas love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1). Perhaps the most encouraging element regarding the path of love in Christianity is that the person who loves God is known by God (1 Corinthians 8:4). Christian love is both vertical and horizontal. North Americans believers will be able to nurture BMB's sense of being loved and spiritual security free from fear and help them grow in wisdom when they better understand the worldview of vertical causality.

⁴² Braswell, *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power*, 58.

G. Particularist versus Universalist or Structure versus Freedom

This particular dichotomy goes beyond what is usually designated as universalist versus particularist cultures. Most North Americans tend to be universalist. They place a higher value on rules than on relationships. In dealing with others their preference is that everyone adhere to established perimeters, agreements, regulations, etc. Contrarily, a particularist culture will value the relationship and will accept deviations as the relationship or circumstances require. It is “based on the logic of the heart and human friendship” and “may also be the chief reason that citizens would not break laws in the first place.”⁴³ This is the unique situation for a majority of Muslims. Most Muslim societies place very high value on connectedness and relationships. At first glance one would think that this means Muslims would have less regard for the black and white of Islam. Rather the opposite is the case. Islam provides a solid framework or structure that knits and binds first the core unit of society, the family, then the extended family or tribe, the greater community and eventually all of Islam or the *ummah*. There is no separation from religious life, civic life, and home life. All function within a unified structure that binds relationships and ensures that members of the society function in a prescribed way. In effect the laws of Islam are binding upon the mind and conscience.⁴⁴ This provides a great comfort on many levels. The Muslim confession or *shahada*, “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger” provides a uniform structure of belief for Muslims worldwide. This cannot be changed or veered from. The homogeneous “tight-knit structure of Islam with

⁴³ Trompenaars, 34.

⁴⁴ Sir Norman Anderson, *Islam in the Modern World: A Christian Perspective* (1990), in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding* Version 2.0, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 2023.

its set prayers and detailed rules helps to keep people together."⁴⁵ Numerous testimonials show that not only is this type of structure appreciated by those born into Islam, but it is also one of the things which attract others. "It is the divine formula for those who want to satisfy their moral and spiritual needs as well as their natural aspirations, for those who want to lead a constructive and sound life, whether personal or social, national or international."⁴⁶ This is possible because of the universality of Islam. There is a sense that values have not been tainted by time or culture. There is certainty, structure, purpose, and meaning.⁴⁷ In an epoch where Christianity appears divided, uncertain of what the universal church believes or why, continually critiqued historically, and decidedly heterogeneous, the reluctance of Islam to permit any self-criticism (or outside criticism for that matter) is appreciated and welcomed by many.⁴⁸

Believers from Muslim background often find the freedom of Christianity confusing. There is no universal creed. There are differences in opinion that range from Jesus is merely an option for relating to God to there is no other way by which humanity can be right with God. There is not one unified agreed upon text by all Christians worldwide. God's moral laws as laid out in scripture are

⁴⁵ Anne Cooper, *Ishmael My Brother: A Biblical Course on Islam*, (1993), in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding Version 2.0*, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 10390.

⁴⁶ Swartley, 105.

⁴⁷ For the past four years (after 20 years overseas in predominately Muslim ministry), my husband and I have worked in the U.S.A. helping churches reach out to their Muslim neighbors. During this time we have met countless individuals who have converted to Islam for this reason. This is an example of a testimony that echoes what we have heard. Paul Varo Martinson, *Islam: An Introduction for Christians*, Stephanie Ormsby Cox, trans. (1994), in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding Version 2.0*, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 5171.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6769. The author indicates that it is the lack of self criticism that causes Islam to lack credibility. While this may be true, it nevertheless provides a solid framework for connectedness. This type of unity is sought out by many in North America and is the norm for many societies outside the Western world.

constantly debated and ignored in the media and much of Christian society. After leaving a way of discipleship that says what one should believe and how to live out belief, to come into a way that speaks of things like “priesthood of the believer” can be overwhelming. Greater than all of this is the lack of unity and cohesiveness. BMB’s look for the tie that binds, that draws all Christians together in one heart and mind, that in effect provides a framework from which the relationships within the smaller and larger community can remain intact. Understanding the Muslim worldview of structure will foster the North American Christian’s ability to demonstrate unity in the midst of diversity.

H. The Qur’an versus the Bible

When a Muslim decides to become a follower of Christ, not only do they often lose their entire social support system, they suddenly find themselves in a place where the basis for their faith, the Qur’an, is called into serious question. The Qur’an is considered perfect revelation and infallible. It is divine without flaw, manipulation, or error.⁴⁹ Though the Torah given to Moses, and the Psalms revealed to David, and the *Injil* revealed to Jesus are acknowledged in Islam, “they are so heavily intermixed with human additions and alterations that it is very difficult to determine what part of them constitutes the original message...much less to guide one’s life by them.”⁵⁰ Even though many who share faith with Muslims accurately point out that the Qur’an encourages them to believe the revelations

⁴⁹ Dwight L. Baker, *Understanding Islam: An Approach to Witness*, (Waco,TX: Baylor Printing Services, 1989) 1-2.

⁵⁰ Suzanne Haneef, *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims*, (USA: Library of Islam, 1996) 21.

(Surah 7:157, 4:136, 18:27), in reality very few Muslims are willing or have ever attempted to study these other revelations. They have been told that what is available to them is corrupted and inaccurate. In addition, the Qur'an is thought to be a recitation, a direct final revelation from the angel Gabriel to Mohammed in Arabic. The Bible on the other hand is thought by Muslims to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot carry the same weight.

That the Qur'an and the Bible are at odds on the very essentials of the Christian faith is obvious. What is perhaps not so obvious is the struggle for a BMB who has lived by the Qur'an to reject all they have been taught and understood about truth and revelation, only to realize that Christians cannot agree upon what is error and what is truth in the Bible. Such open criticism, disagreement, free examination and open discussion of the scriptures are anathema to the new BMB. Whereas once their holy book revealed the divine will, now the book that is to lead and guide is questioned. BMB's acknowledge and understand that revelation is in a person, Jesus Christ and that Christ expressed the divine will. Nevertheless understanding of and thirst for truth is at the center of their decision to follow Christ. The Bible is the revelation of that truth. Truth is complete, permanent and essential to happiness. As they turn to the Bible as their motivator of thought and end of knowledge as they had previously the Qur'an, it is difficult to comprehend an evolution of thought and understanding which is accepted amongst Christians.⁵¹ North American Christians are now in a place where they must understand the differences in concepts of revelation. Additionally, they must

⁵¹ Waddy, 14-15.

know not only what they believe, but why they believe; if they are to help BMB's work through the confusing maze of what is absolute truth, what is philosophy, and what is merely opinion.

I. View of Religion: External versus Internal

"Islam cannot be defined only as a religion...neither can it be termed as a faith only. It is first and foremost a socio-political and socio-religious system, as well as socio-economic, socio-educational, legislative, judiciary, and military system..."⁵² All aspects of life are governed by Islam. Succinctly it can be said that for Islam life is a part of religion, whereas for much of the Christian world, religion is a part of life. In North America there is not only great diversity of religion, but it is in fact this freedom to be diverse that birthed North America. North Americans value the freedom to decide what role religion will play in their day to day lives. Historically, those who settled North America did so out of discontent with authorities that were imposing religious thought. Though North America struggled in defining religious liberty, freedom of religion nevertheless translated into a value that left religion a private choice to be fit in the newly forming society. This is a direct antithesis to Islam which at its formation was designed to bring cohesiveness to an Arabic society that was divided by tribalism and belief. Mohammed did not just provide a way of believing but a way of living. Religion encompasses all of life from the most basic personal hygiene regulations to the most major issues

⁵² Sam Solomon and E. Almqadi, *The Mosque Exposed*, (Charlottesville, VA: ANM Press, 2007) 20-21.

in the community.⁵³ Mohammed sought continuity in constructing a religious system which incorporated culture, politics and already existing beliefs in a new faith system that came to be Islam.⁵⁴

Followers of Jesus who come from a Muslim background can often find the way that North Americans compartmentalize faith frustrating. Suddenly they find themselves in a place where they must learn to live morally, not based on a system that encompasses all of life, but on a righteousness that is imparted by the Holy Spirit so that their lifestyle speaks of the Spirit's presence. They find themselves in a sort of 'cultural schizophrenia' where cultural and spiritual references have changed, but without a shift from within.⁵⁵ North American believers need an understanding of the external supporting structure of Islam in order to help BMB's walk step by step in the light and revelation of the Holy Spirit.

⁵³ Ibid. 20.

⁵⁴ For more on Mohammed's genius in incorporating existing culture into a religious system that unified and brought strength see Karen Armstrong's *Islam: A Short History*.

⁵⁵ For more on the idea of cultural schizophrenia as Islam comes face to face with the West and modernity see Daryush Shayegan's *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West: Modern Intellectual and Political History of the Middle East*.

Chapter 3: The Question of Contextualization

A. The Definition.

More than one author has noted the opportunity afforded the North American church with the massive migration that is occurring in today's world. Richard Bailey comments that this is perhaps the greatest migration of history with an import as equally profound as the Protestant reformation, past revolutions, and the collapse of various world powers.⁵⁶ Bailey's key point is that this has led to a shifting of paradigms in the world missions movement. One of the paradigms noted is one must go to another country to be a missionary.⁵⁷ This is no longer true. One simply goes to another culture. This has permitted a new day for the missional church. No longer are career missionaries the only ones best poised to minister cross culturally; the Western church can now engage directly in the missions endeavor at home. Part of the global conversation for this year's Lausanne Movement Cape Town gathering is on the Diaspora. They note that "the church is uniquely called, empowered and mandated for this task of discipling the Diaspora..."⁵⁸ This means that many of the skills cross cultural workers have learned and developed are now needed by the Western church. Understanding and effectively using contextualization is one of those skills.

The concept of contextualization encompasses various characteristics that give the gospel meaning to a particular culture. Douglas Hayward identifies some

⁵⁶ Bailey, 51.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 55.

⁵⁸ For this conversation and more on the global conversation taking place before the 2010 Cape Town gathering go to <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/home/diaspora>.

of those characteristics as vernacular, expressions of faith and worship patterns, theological development, metaphors, symbols and images, communication channels, ethics and values, community structure, and discipleship.⁵⁹ These elements are indicators as to whether or not the Gospel has become at home within a culture. Though discussed for over thirty years, contextualization continues to be an issue cross cultural workers grapple with. While the idea has been well established and accepted, the appropriate extent of implementation continues to be debated. If the degree of application of the concept in Muslim contexts continues to be debated in the professional world of cross cultural workers, then the average North American church attendee will surely be beleaguered. D.S. Gilliland defines contextualization as:

The way in which the Word as Scripture, and the Word as revealed in the truths of culture interact in determining Christian truth for a given people. For the purpose of missions there must be a maximizing of the meaning of Christian truth for the particular situation in which and for the message is developed.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the North American church has failed to wrestle with the fact that her own gospel is in fact contextualized. The way she views the world, how she thinks and operates, how she expresses Biblical ideas, how she interacts inside her community and outside, and her decision making process is all processed via her own cultural history and context.⁶¹ While this contextualization has provided meaning to the church, authors such as Soong-Chan Rah point out that the

⁵⁹ Douglas Hayward, "Measuring Contextualization in Church and Missions", *International Journal of Frontier Missions* Vol. 12:3, July-Sept. 1995, 135-138.

⁶⁰ DC Gilliland in Daniel Shaw's "Contextualizing: the Power and the Glory", *International Journal of Frontier Missions* Vol 17:1, Spring 2000.

⁶¹ For more on the seven dimension grid of contextualization see David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978.)

Western church is in fact captive to her culture and needs to be freed in order to develop a complete Gospel.⁶² In light of this it is perhaps advantageous to view contextualization in a broader sense. Samuel Escobar gives an alternative definition of contextualization as a movement that seeks to affirm local cultures in their search for autonomy and full expression, as a reactive process in contrast to globalization.⁶³ This seems a more workable and understandable definition for the North American church in the midst of significant diversification. Many have noted that Sunday morning is the most segregated time of the week in North American society. Escobar's definition provides the church the occasion to affirm the uniqueness and dignity of the different peoples finding place within her community. It also provides an opportunity to forgo any preconceptions of rightness or superiority but rather accept and grow from diversity. Not only does this make for a more complete gospel, but the church will not be attempting (or expecting for that matter) the impossible process of assimilation of other cultures into the community.

No matter how hard man tries, it is impossible for him to divest himself of his own culture, for it has penetrated to the roots of his nervous system and determines how he perceives the world. Most of culture lies hidden and is outside voluntary control making up the warp and weft of human existence. Even when small fragments of culture are elevated to awareness, they are difficult to change, not only because they are so personally experienced but because people cannot act or interact at all in any meaningful way except through the medium of culture.⁶⁴

⁶² For more on the future of global Christianity and the diversification of the North American church see Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009.)

⁶³ Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 61.

⁶⁴ Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1982) 188.

B. Degrees of Contextualization

Joshua Massey in describing God's amazing creative diversity in faith movements amongst Muslim peoples identified six degrees of contextualization.⁶⁵ In C1 contextualization the church where the BMB participates in community is completely foreign both in culture and in language. In North America this is the most common opportunity for community for the BMB. C2 is similar to C1 except that the language of BMB is used rather than English. While there are some churches in North America that meet this description they are few in number. Most communities who go so far as to speak a language other than English, will employ other cultural adaptations as well, making them more C3 than C2. C3 will implement cultural adaptations that are non-related to the Islamic faith, such as dress, music, food, etc. There are some communities for BMB's that meet this description, i.e. multiple Iranian fellowships and some Arab Christian fellowships both found predominately in major metropolitan areas. C4 will go a step further than C3 by adopting some Muslim practices that are Biblically acceptable such as prayer postures, fasting, alms giving, etc. C5 will engage fully in the life of the mosque and the Muslim community and is still known as a Muslim who follows Jesus. While C4 and C5 may exist in North America, they are not known to this author nor were they identified by those BMB's interviewed. C6 is a bit different in that these are secret believers who keep their faith private in order to evade puni-

⁶⁵ For Massey's full explanation of C1-C6 contextualization see Joshua Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Vol. 17:1, Spring 2000, p. 5-14. It should also be noted that 'C' in C1-C6 designates community.

tive consequences. C6 BMB's are obviously difficult to identify, but many BMB's testify to a period of secrecy before publicly professing Christ.

Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques identify the types of churches that are possible in a culturally diverse society.⁶⁶ Pocock's and Henriques' descriptions of congregations are realistic choices currently available throughout North America. Applying the contextualization scale to each of these categories, helps gage the level of cultural familiarity a BMB might experience. There is the dominate-culture church which would equate with C1. There are multi-congregation churches in which various ethnic groups may conduct services and be anywhere from C1 to C3. Interethnic congregations and Ethnic-Specific churches are those described in the C3 category. However, there is one category that defies classification and may in fact be an option most attractive to BMB's who find themselves in areas where ethnic specific churches cannot be found. A dominate-culture church with a multicultural fellowship will address the needs of a particular immigrant group whether refugees, students, business owners, immigrant professionals, migrant workers, or followers of other world religions such as Muslims.⁶⁷ One example of this would be Church of the Nations, a multicultural fellowship of University Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.⁶⁸ Addressing the needs of students the church can fluctuate as to which group predominates changing the style and fellowship of the congregation, though it has been for the most part

⁶⁶ For full description of the choices facing the church in culturally pluralistic society see Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church: Helping Your Church Thrive in a Diverse Society*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker books, 2002) 133-142.

⁶⁷ Pocock and Henriques, 136.

⁶⁸ I took a team to this church to learn about their ministry in November of 2008. The team I took was from Oakland Baptist Church.

peoples from Asia. Churches such as Oakland Baptist Church in Rock Hill, South Carolina finds models such as this helpful as they have fifteen to twenty different nationalities represented in their English as a Second Language Class and their International Student Ministry. This model defies a contextualization classification. Yet it may well be a more viable option for BMB's. While there may not be aspects that are specific to cultures that are Islamic, they are nevertheless non-western. The uniqueness of immigration today is that with the exception of certain areas in larger cities, one non-western people group rarely dominates. This diversity calls for a different approach; one of cultural sensitivity rather than contextualization. This concept will be dealt with more fully at a later point. However, there are advantages to these types of fellowships. Foremost, aspects of culture from Eastern and Southern hemispheres will prevail. Secondly, there would be a greater understanding of the challenges immigrants face whether first or second generation. Thirdly, there would be greater understanding of the isolation one might experience when stepping outside of family and culture to become a follower of Christ. Fourthly, there would be greater understanding in addressing justice issues of the countries of origin. And finally, the possibility of a fuller more holistic gospel for both the North American and the non-Westerner; one that is not hindered by culture, but more fully revealed as different cultures dialogue together. "The day is surely past when we simply allow third world believers to 'have their say' while we Western theologians prepare the definite answers to their questions. For now we recognize that if we listen carefully we find our own assumptions challenged and our thinking sharpened."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ William Dyrness in Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 137.

C. The Challenge of Contextualization for North American Churches

Dr. Paul Martindale in his paper "The Diaspora Muslims in North America" makes a clear case for the necessity of training cross cultural lay workers to reach out to Muslims residing in North America. He points out the need for sustained exposure to the gospel through relationships of trust with Christians.⁷⁰ With the handful of trained professional cross cultural workers available in North America, nurturing these types of relationships on any scale is impossible without laity involvement. Martindale names a number of organizations that are addressing this need. This list is certainly not exhaustive and as Islam increasingly becomes a greater concern for North Americans, organizations investing personnel and funding for training are increasing. However, once a relationship bears fruit all too often the BMB is unable to find a faith community in which they can easily flourish and feel "at home." As one BMB stated, "I was the one who had to adjust. We both needed to some homework. They didn't know what to do with me."⁷¹ While those ministering in the beginning may well have learned how to cross barriers, the life of the church is still entrenched in Western contextualization. In order to become a welcoming nurturing community for BMB's, churches in North America must examine their own cultural mores, ways that faith has been contextualized within their culture, and develop cross cultural sensitivity skills. In light of

⁷⁰ Martindale, 19-20.

⁷¹ N.B., Interview by author, May 4, 2010.

ner captivity to culture, the North American church must learn to empathize and develop intercultural communication skills.

"In intercultural communication, not only is difference our domain, but it is our avenue into understanding... To the degree that focus is placed on similarity, there is a good chance that the other can only be seen through comparison with and likeness to ourselves... So emerges the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Empathy, on the other hand, involves doing ones' best to imagine another person's situation without projecting self into it. We try to enter into the other's experience more purely from their point of view. Thus emerges the silver rule: "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them." This suggests attention to listening and the capability to identify and monitor the habit of projection."⁷²

When the church community projects onto the BMB her own cultural expectations, she continues the mistake of generations of Western missionaries in presuming the superiority of Western culture and Western understanding of the gospel.⁷³

The challenge of cultural sensitivity in the midst of multiculturalism is not unique to this period of history. The early church faced a similar challenge. The first followers of Christ lived in a world linked by the Roman road system. While this may not compare to the internet highway or today's skyways, it nevertheless permitted a movement and mingling of people unknown in previous history. Upon entering Jerusalem one could hear multiple languages, experience multiple cul-

⁷²H. Ned Seelye, *Experiential Activities for Intercultural Learning*, (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, Inc. 1996) 11.

⁷³ In section 10 of the Lausanne Covenant the attitude of superiority of culture is addressed. It states that culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. The blind spot for North America is the presumption that she has done this and is in fact 'right' and therefore superior. To read the Lausanne Covenant go to <http://www.lausanne.org/covenant>.

tures, and encounter a plurality of religions and philosophies.⁷⁴ In order to share faith and disciple new followers, these first followers were required to identify and let go of their Jewishness, learn how to relate to cultures that were anathemas to them, effectively communicate regardless of linguistic and cultural barriers, and be community for seekers and followers from a multiplicity of backgrounds. Even as they were required to engage in cultural exchange, they learned to live counter culture that their lives might point to Christ. Dr. Jim Dennison notes that Jerusalem of this day looks more like our modern world than any other time or place in history.⁷⁵ The obvious hurdle for the North American church not faced by her ancestors is that she is not the outsider. Nor is she struggling to be established. Therefore she is prone to disregard the responsibility of being a safe and nurturing community for those of other backgrounds. Professional cross cultural workers are uniquely equipped to be the culture brokers between the church and BMB's. Identifying and addressing areas of cultural variance, then training and brokering mutual understanding will provide the North American church with the skills needed to intentionally be community to BMB's.

Finally, the North American church and her BMB brothers and sisters are faced with the commission of the Lord Jesus to go into all the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). After examining ways that she has contextualized the message and become captive to her culture, the church in North America has the unique opportunity to walk hand in hand with BMB's as they reach out with

⁷⁴ See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), for a detailed description of the world where these early followers lived out faith and community.

⁷⁵ This statement was made at an MBB conference hosted by Gospel for Muslims in Dallas, Texas in September 2009.

the gospel to others of Muslim background. Jesus mandated and intended for the church to be missional and as seen just above the early followers were missional. Inimitable to the church of North America are the resources and assets available to the missional endeavor. However, as happened with the message itself, the methods are clearly Western based and developed for a Western context.⁷⁶ Opportunities to partner and empower our BMB brothers and sisters slip away due to cultural clashes, suspicion, and lack of cultural understanding. One BMB waited over six years before her church was willing to bless and undergird her outreach to Muslims. Even now everything she does must pass through a committee of which none are BMB's.⁷⁷ Samuel Escobar explains that the Western church has a new global mission as she is called to participate in new partnerships both on her own doorstep and globally. "Mission at our doorstep" may well become the new training ground for the new partnerships that will also carry on mission around the world."⁷⁸ In this new training ground, the North American church has four hurdles to overcome. First, she must realize she is no longer the only major contributor to the world of missions and acknowledge the assets other cultures bring to the task. Secondly, she should no longer outsource all of her missional endeavors to Western career missionaries. Thirdly, she must be willing to learn from past mistakes of those who did go to foreign places and learn to be

⁷⁶Rene Padilla in his paper to the Lausanne Congress of 1974 describes it as materialistic and truncated. He also calls for a unity that does not permit the American church to monopolize interpreting the Gospel or the mission. See Rene Padilla, "Evangelism and The World", *The Lausanne Movement*, <http://www.lausanne.org/documents/lau1docs/0134.pdf>. Samuel Escobar warns the contextualist against the danger of loving one's own culture and language in such a way that they actually become idols. There has been at times a "misplaced zeal to preserve cultural forms..." See Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*, (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), p. 61 and 81.

⁷⁷ S. G., Interview by author, May 6, 2010.

⁷⁸ Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 20.

comfortable with a non-Western contextualized message and method. And finally, she must learn how with sensitivity to join hands with those better equipped for some of the task simply because of their cultural and linguistic proximity to those being reached. Again, with a “foot in both worlds” i.e. North American culture and non-Western culture, professional cross-cultural workers are uniquely skilled to help the North American church acquire the cultural skills needed for this new global mission. Appendix C is an outline of a training module for how a church might pursue training and equipping their congregation.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ This module in its entirety can be located and downloaded for use at <http://www.cbfinternationals.com/Portals/132/Resources/Helping%20the%20Church%20Learn%20to%20Minister%20in%20a%20Multicultural%20World.pdf>.

Chapter 4: Research and Findings

A. Background and Method

From 1986 until the summer of 2006, my husband and I worked amongst Muslims in francophone West Africa and amongst Muslim immigrants in francophone Europe. While in West Africa, the methodology focused on learning the language, culture and context and beginning a local language church of BMB's. Helps from such authors as Phil Parshall, Greg Livingstone, and Bill Musk were invaluable.⁸⁰ That church continues, but other local churches and Christian organizations of primarily BCB's have not been supportive in material or spiritual means. The desire was that they consolidate with existing communities. Europe provided a different challenge. While Muslims do live in tightly knit communities that are more often than not geographically as well as culturally definable, the church in Europe (and society in general) looks for full integration and assimilation of Muslim immigrants into the host society.⁸¹ As we worked with local francophone churches to facilitate their outreach to Muslim immigrants, overcoming this hurdle proved at times insurmountable. The expectation was for the seeker to cross all cultural barriers and become Western (particularly francophone culture) as well as become a follower of Christ. Eventually we began working with Arabic BCB's. Obviously there were fewer hurdles to cross and there were many cultural points of connection. Yet as Don Little noted in his research in "Fruitful

⁸⁰ See bibliography for various works by these authors.

⁸¹ The debate in Europe regarding Muslim immigrants and their integration into the society is well documented and continues to be debated at all levels of government. The churches have simply carried societal values over into their communities. Don Little notes this trend in his paper "Fruitful Approaches to the Discipleship of Believers of Muslim Background (p. 180).

Approaches to the Discipleship of Believer's from Muslim Background" there were often negative consequences for the BMB.⁸² This stemmed most often from one of three sources: residual fear and pain from persecution Arab BCB's experienced in their home countries, a sort of caste societal order amongst those of Muslim background with people from Africa and the Near East for example being 'lower' than those from Arab countries, and distrust or suspicion of Muslim seekers.

In 2006 we were asked to return to the United States in order to help churches minister to their Muslim neighbors. Based primarily in North and South Carolina in the past four years we have led numerous seminars, preached in countless churches, and built a network of about 450 churches and individuals who are interested in reaching the Internationals in their midst. Here the situation is drastically different than Europe, as there is very little possibility of a church reaching out with some organized program to Muslims except in very large cities. As churches and individual Christians become aware of their Muslim neighbor and desire to develop a relationship with them, there is a need for understanding and training.⁸³ In the past four years as we have been doing this, we have received numerous contacts from BMB's and from BCB's wanting to know and understand how to accommodate these isolated individuals into the life of the North American church. BMB's are frustrated as they are the ones who are continually crossing cultural barriers and thus feel cut off from their societal networks as well

⁸² Don Little, "Fruitful Approaches to the Discipleship of Believers from Muslim Background", (Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Thesis Paper, November 2008) 181.

⁸³ See Paul Martindale's paper for further explanation regarding the need for training.

as BCB communities. BCB's are frustrated because they have shared faith and developed a rewarding relationship, only to realize that they are not meeting needs of the BMB. This project focused on determining areas of greatest cultural difference between BMB's and the North American church in order to help the church become a welcoming community and an effective partner with BMB's in ministry. It consisted of researching cultural and religious values particularly in an Islamic context as compared to a North American context, identifying major areas of difference and conflict, survey data gathering on cultural values from BMB's and interviews of BMB's.⁸⁴

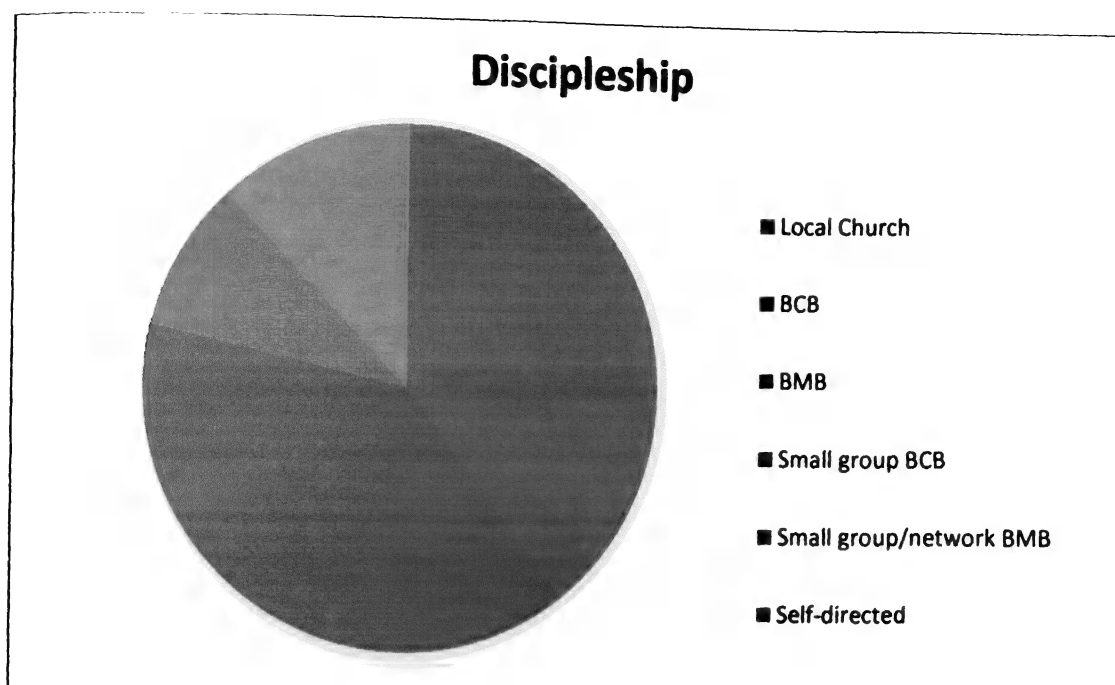
B. Survey Results

There were thirty-three BMB respondents to the survey. Of those, seven left the survey incomplete. Upon investigation it appears there were two reasons for this. First, after the first few questions language became an issue for a few. Second, others unfamiliar with online surveys did not realize there were multiple sections. This in itself is indicative of areas where misunderstanding and conflict may occur between BMB's and their Christian communities. Though able to function fully in English, it is not always comfortable or easy. Several BMB's noted during the interviews that when speaking with an accent, the regard and attentiveness of listeners leads them to believe they are thought of as stupid. When they actually find themselves in a moment of not being able to express them-

⁸⁴ The survey instrument and the interview questions can be found in Appendices A & B.

selves or of not being able to comprehend they simply say nothing or retreat from the situation. Nevertheless, doing the survey online permitted many BMB's from networks unknown to the author and from all over North America to participate. It also permitted them complete anonymity. Name and contact information were provided only if the participant chose to do so.

Survey questions were divided into two main areas: general demographic and religious background information and questions dealing with cultural and religious values. Responders were fairly equally divided between male and female. The age range was anywhere from twenty to sixty years. Only one respondent was over sixty. The majority lives outside of their country of origin; though six were BMB's who were born and raised in the West. This is significant as those raised in the West would likely view North American cultural and religious values differently. The number of years respondents have been followers of Christ was also fairly evenly distributed; anywhere between one to over twenty years. Notably, none of the respondents had been discipled personally by another BMB. All of their discipleship had occurred either through a local church, a BCB, or self directed discipleship. Three did state that their discipleship had occurred through an involvement in a small group or network of BMB's.

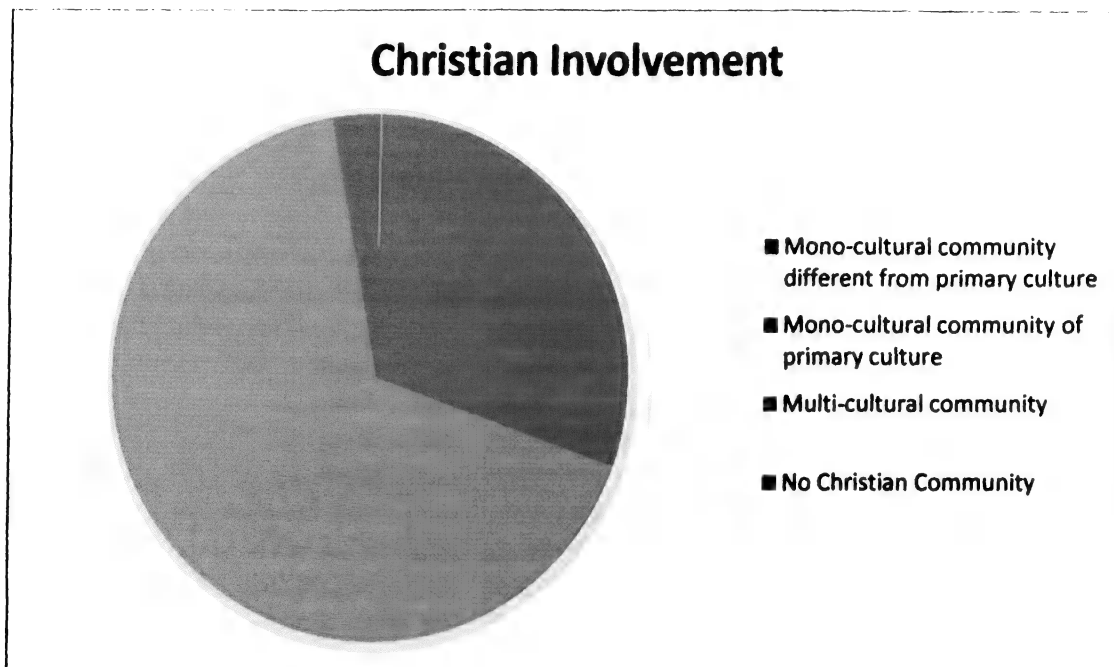


One BMB noted that discipleship as the church in North America might view it does not occur in the Muslim context. This may account for the lack of discipleship by BMB's. Also, as relationships with BCB's are more readily accessible in North America versus BMB's, it is reasonable to assume that discipleship will occur in this context. Materials specific to the needs of BMB's should be made available to those engaged in these types of discipleship relationships.⁸⁵

Only one respondent describes their primary Christian involvement as a mono-cultural community of their own culture, which is not surprising considering how few communities of that description exist in the West. Sadly, one stated that they currently have no Christian community involvement. Two-thirds of the res-

⁸⁵ Our experience has been that the most effective method of discipleship is the use of chronological Bible storytelling. There are multiple resources on the use of storytelling as an outreach tool. While it does focus on those who are primarily oral learners, the sound construction of the whole Biblical narrative while forging a relationship provides a solid foundation for the new BMB, even those with a Western learning style.

pondents stated they are involved in multi-cultural communities, perhaps a 'second-best' choice when unable to find a community of their own culture.⁸⁶ Finally roughly one-third participated in communities that were mono-cultural and not of their own culture.

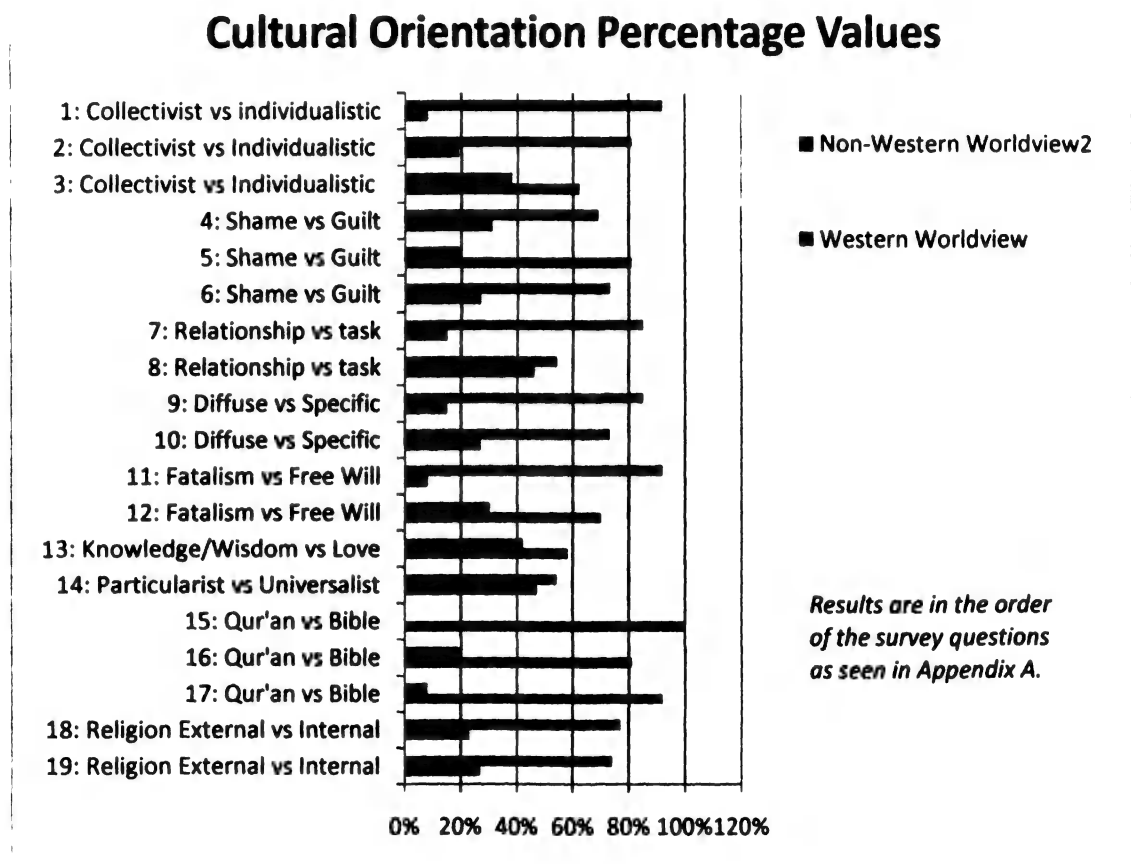


The lack of availability of worship, discipleship, and community within a context similar to their background indicates a need for forming communities that can be as culturally accommodating as possible. Time is the enemy in this case. The scripture, Acts 17:26-27, speaks of the seasons that God ordains in order that humankind might reach out for him and find him. This is such an époque. Never before has such an opening been afforded the North American church. Until such time as there are cultural contexts in which the BMB can experience worship, re-

⁸⁶ Ryan Allen notes that these types of communities are particularly helpful to immigrants in establishing social networks. See Ryan Allen, "The bonding and bridging roles of religious institutions for refugees in a non-gateway context", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 33, No. 6, June 2010, 1049-1068.

spect, relationship, discipleship i.e. community, the church risks missing this season of time pregnant with possibility.

The following chart indicates the cultural orientation held by the respondents.



In the area of collectivist versus individualistic, the BMB's held strong to their collectivist values with the exception of the third question.⁸⁷ The third question

⁸⁷ See Appendix A.

asked for them to choose between whether they exist only in relation to other people or whether they must be guided by what they think is right even if contrary to the group. Over sixty-one percent was willing to stand alone for what they felt was right. Considering that BMB's have made a decision for Christ in opposition to their societal and religious support systems in Islam, this percentage is comprehensible. The respondents continued to hold strong values in honor and shame, again with the exception of one question. The second question dealt with whether one would want to hide after a wrong or would want to confess and apologize. Over eighty percent valued confession. This may well be a testament to their walk with Christ and the forgiveness experienced as Christ's followers. Not surprisingly the respondents valued relationships over tasks; as they did a diffuse orientation over a specific. The values begin to digress from what might be expected of a Muslim believer in the questions dealing more with faith issues. Respondents still viewed God as very much in control of their destiny and saw surrender to God as important. However, rather than just be stoic and accepting whatever "fate" came their way as a punishment, they valued proactively seeking God's forgiveness. While knowledge and wisdom was important, they nevertheless embraced the Biblical concept of love of God and neighbor. In contrast to what we might find in many of our Protestant churches in North America they continued to value certain moral absolutes, but nearly half accepted that there will be differences in how others decide to imitate Jesus' example. BMB's overwhelmingly valued the truth of the Bible versus the Qur'an. This is notable when considering issues of contextualization. The need for a high level of contextuali-

zation for the BMB perhaps does not exist here. Indeed, all interviewed, with the exception of one, were vehemently opposed to a contextualization that permitted use of the Qur'an and worship at a mosque. The participant not in direct opposition merely stated that he would have to think long and hard before doing so. Finally, in contrast to North American values, the respondents viewed religion as an external system that governs life, rather than compartmentalizing faith as a mere part of their lives. There were six respondents who did not view religion this way. As there were that many who were born and raised in North America, that divergence may be accounted for.

In the final section of the survey, respondents were asked to select the aspects of faith and relationships most valued.⁸⁸

| Value | Respondents |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Loving God | 23 |
| Obedying God | 21 |
| Forgiveness | 20 |
| Mercy | 18 |
| Wisdom | 17 |
| Family and Friends | 15 |
| Morality | 8 |
| Freedom to choose | 6 |
| Respect | 2 |
| Independence | 0 |

The top five chosen all deal with the respondents' relationship to God. Family and friends though not insignificant are not as highly significant as God. Not one chose independence as one might expect North Americans to do and only two

⁸⁸ This would have been more valuable in what it revealed if it had been compared to responses by BCB's. While this may also be true to some degree for the other questions, those were based on a basic understanding of cultural worldviews.

cnose respect with would normally be important in the BMB culture. Overall, the survey reveals that while BMB's hold to certain cultural norms, the decision to follow Christ in discipleship and their time in Western culture has caused some shifts in cultural and religious mores.

C. Some Case Studies

The following case studies were taken from the fourteen different interviews conducted while gathering data. The names of those interviewed have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

Case Study One: *Elliot* is originally from Afghanistan. After witnessing multiple atrocities in his home country, he was smuggled across borders at the age of eight along with his five year old brother. After being taken in at an orphanage in Europe he was adopted by a single female American missionary who eventually brought him to the United States. It was only after considerable reflection and prayer that *Elliot* became a follower of Christ. Now twenty-eight years old, he finds it difficult to enter into the life of the church in the town where he resides. He states that Christ helped him overcome fears and insecurities, but he has not found in the church a place where he feels connected. Nor is he able to "let go" of his family back in Afghanistan. "People here just blow off my need for my family back home. They say I have a heavenly father and brothers and sisters in Christ. Even though I am a Christian my family situation has not changed. Their ex-

pectations of me has not changed. I feel torn.”⁸⁹ *Elliot* describes a common frustration for many Internationals, not only BMB’s, here in Western society. They value the group and operate within the expectations of group rather than the individual. They operate collectively or rather within community. Add to this as a BMB, *Elliot*’s natural desire for spiritual framework and solidarity, *ummah*, his dissatisfaction is understandable. Western society contrarily values the individual even above society.⁹⁰ This is demonstrated in the church community’s reaction to *Elliot*’s struggle. There is no insurmountable need for the earthly family or community and even if there is a sentimental desire for the earthly community, one should simply take comfort and function within an esoteric knowledge of a heavenly family. North Americans value their ability to get by on their own, to just “suck it up and do it.” While church does provide a certain unity, it is arguable that it mimics that provided by *ummah*. Disregarded are *Elliot*’s need to base decisions on the collective good and will of his community, to function in a manner acceptable to the group, and to count on the community for support and help when necessary. *Elliot* is caught between two opposing values. Because he is strongly connected to both, he abhors disappointing or showing disrespect to either community. Thus *Elliot* has elected to separate from the church and live isolated from both communities. This has led to unresolved depression and anger.

It might seem strange that *Elliot* though separated from his family and culture at a young age would exhibit such strong ties. Thomas Sowell in his book *Race and Culture: A Worldview* points out that people who are separated from

⁸⁹ E., Interview by Author, May 29, 2010.

⁹⁰ Elmer, 134.

their culture with little to no ties will nevertheless exhibit strong identification with and characteristics of their mother culture.⁹¹ *Elliot* has a deep connectedness to his culture of origin, regardless of years in the Western world. "Culture is the story of reality that individuals and groups value and accept as a guide for organizing their lives."⁹² *Elliot* no longer had a guide to organize his life and the church had not become for him a community in which this could take place.

Case Study Two: *Bernard* was just a boy the first time a friend of the family sexually molested him. Once word spread among the various connections that *Bernard* had been so disgraced, he was used sexually by multiple adult males. Adding to the pain was that *Bernard* was preyed upon at a time when his parents were going through the divorce and the associated negative stigma in his culture. The shame *Bernard* felt due to the fragmented family and the sub-sequential sexual immorality was overwhelming. He finally began to ask himself, "What is the purpose of life?" Suicide became an option for coping. During his adolescent years, *Bernard* heard the message of Christ. He understood from the message the purpose of existence. The scripture Second Corinthians 5:15 spoke powerfully to him. He realized he could be a new creation. All the shame separating him from society would be washed away. *Bernard's* shame was not to end however. He publicly professed his new faith in Christ and as a result was refused admission into university and was subjected to imprisonment and beatings. *Bernard* had had shame thrust upon him involuntarily and had made choices indepen-

⁹¹ Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture: A Worldview*, (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 1994), 28.

⁹² H. Ned Seeyle, *Experiential Activities for Intercultural Learning*, (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1996), 9.

dently outside the norms of his society. He suffered the consequences of both. Now, having lived for some time in the West, though he appreciates the positive outlook, the focus on success rather than failure, and the independence of Western culture, *Bernard* finds himself bereft and frustrated that everyone seems more concerned about their own rights to the point of division and estrangement fragmenting the Christian community. The indifference of the Christian community towards a variety of issues confounds him and he expresses a need for the community to speak out and exert a greater voice for Christian values. Now *Bernard* spends his time counseling other young men like himself who have been sexually abused in Muslim societies; young men who have been forced to sell their bodies, indeed their souls, for the price of a sandwich. *Bernard* understands personal and societal shame. He doesn't understand Western values that permits indifference towards shameful behavior.

Case Study Three: *Ronald* came to the United States for educational purposes and eventually became a financial planner. Mixing friendship with business as if often the case in relationship focused cultures, *Ronald* had agreed to help a friend from his home country with his finances. When the time came to sign the papers the friend had time to connect with *Ronald* only after church one Sunday. *Ronald* decided to attend this primarily Persian culture congregation and see what had attracted his friend. Immediately *Ronald* was taken into the community, sharing meals, attending events, sharing business networks, etc. *Ronald* decided to follow Christ and after intense discipleship by other BMB's became a leader in the outreach ministry of this church. *Ronald* was forced to move some ten years

later when work became scarce in that part of the country. He moved from there to the opposite coast line. There are no churches of his cultural background in the area in which he lives. After searching for a while for a place to plug in, *Ronald* finally decided to join an American culture church. *Ronald* finds himself struggling in the community. He feels disconnected. He perseveres because he knows the importance of being connected to a body of believers and because he has an understanding of North American mentality. But he misses the hospitality, the friendship, the connectedness. He laments the businesslike ministry approach of the church. Because of this he has not yet involved himself in any sort of leadership capacity. It would seem at first glance, that *Ronald* is not making the appropriate social moves in order to integrate into the new community. However, the relational nature of his culture would indicate that he is welcomed and honored when hospitality is extended to toward him by the host environment. It would be a risk to ingratiate himself into this new community and then in some way be rebuffed or rejected. Hospitality when not extended often leads to a sense of isolation.⁹³ Additionally, the business i.e. ministry of the church is done by those who put themselves forward and are willing to work towards accomplishing the task. For *Ronald*, the task can only be accomplished within the framework of relationships, honor, and invitation.⁹⁴ Therefore he hesitates to step forward and use years of well honed leadership skills.

⁹³ Paul Varo Martinson, *Islam: An Introduction for Christians*, in *World of Islam: Resources for Understanding Version 2.0*, (Global Mapping International, 2006) 5171.

⁹⁴ For more on the correct protocol of hospitality and mixing business and relationships within the Muslim context, see George Braswell, Jr., *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics, and Power*, "Chapter 7: Muslim

Case Study Four: *Anita* was born to a bi-racial couple. In her country this brought on an element of shame to her mother. Consequently *Anita* was placed in an orphanage. Though *Anita* learned about Christ in the orphanage, when she was returned to her birth mother she followed Islam and was married to a Muslim man. Years of abuse eventually led *Anita* to call upon God for help and follow Jesus. She quickly became a leader in the church and mentor/teacher to the numerous cross-cultural workers in her country. Various missions depended upon *Anita* for a myriad of needs and always seemed very understanding and kind of her situation with her abusive husband. They called her friend and socialized with her. She felt abandoned and betrayed at the missions' reactions when simultaneously her husband divorced her leaving her with three children to support and the country's currency devalued. She thought there had been a strong personal relationship between her and members of the missions and therefore she could count on an increase in salary that would compensate the devalued currency. For the missions business was business. *Anita* had agreed upon a certain salary and that was what had been budgeted. They saw no reason that *Anita* should receive a greater compensation. Also, if she was compensated then all workers regardless of their relationship to the mission members would have to be compensated. This was despite the fact that the mission members received a cost of living adjustment at the time of the devaluation. *Anita* left and joined a new mission that had just arrived.

Anita eventually met and married an American pastor and relocated to the United States. She is heavily involved in the life of the church. She increasingly finds it difficult to manage conversations in groups when the conversation becomes personal. On one hand she realizes that to share insecurities and frailties can be helpful to others. Yet she is concerned about saying something that would cause her pastor husband to lose face. Additionally, after her experience with the mission, she does not want to become too vulnerable. As a leader she is not sure how much is safe to disclose. *Anita* also experiences conflict in leadership style with her husband. Being from a specific culture he is cut and dry and gets straight to the point when working on a project with constituents. *Anita* is frustrated when she feels relationships are neglected and not properly nurtured for an effective working relationship.

Case Study Five: *Felicia* was born in North America to a Catholic mother and a Muslim father. When religion began to cause conflict in the marriage her mother converted to Islam. She grew up in a Muslim commune which had its own grocery store, school, and mosque. *Felicia* began to question Islam when difficult events led to her father's loss of employment and subsequent move to another state. As she questioned she became perplexed that in the Prophet Mohammed's night vision, Jesus was only in second heaven. If a sinless perfect man with all understanding and knowledge was only in the second heaven, then she felt she stood no chance of being in heaven at all. *Felicia* decided that if she was going to hell then she would give God a reason for it. This period of rebellion lasted through her high school years. Her senior year she was at band camp

when a girl that she did not really know or like came up to her, grabbed the cigarette hanging out of *Felicia's* mouth, broke it in half, and then walked away. *Felicia* demanded to know what prompted such action. The girl simply stated that it was because she loved her. A very surprised and confused *Felicia* began to build a relationship with the girl who repeatedly asked her to come to her church youth group. After great persistence *Felicia* agreed. *Felicia* was intrigued with the idea of man who would come down from heaven and reach out to sinful humanity. Sometime later she discovered a group that was in a time of prayer. She learned that they were praying for her. The love that caused them to do that "floored" her. She gave her life to Christ that very night.

Felicia suffered greatly at the hands of her father after he learned of her decision and involvement with various faith organizations. Yet the love that had been shown to her before her conversion and after, impelled her to demonstrate the same relentless love to her family. As a result her brother now follows Christ, and when *Felicia* married a Christian some time later her father escorted her down the aisle.

Case Study Six: *Jonathan* left his home country to study in the United States. He left when his country was in a time of turmoil. It escalated as his home country and another Muslim country engaged in warfare. *Jonathan* was confused. Why would two Muslim countries who were supposedly in agreement about faith be at such odds with one another? He began to question God. One night he was driving home and at a red light he saw a book. Rather than run over it, he stopped and picked it up throwing it casually in the back of his seat. When he ar-

rived at home his wife informed him that he had picked up a Bible. Not thinking much of it, he simply put it aside.

Sometime later his wife left him with their small daughter. Distraught that he had faithfully studied and followed the Islamic faith, yet Islam had not kept his country and his family together; he decided to test the truth. One night he placed an open Qur'an on one side of the bed and an open Bible on the other. He dreamt that night of Jesus who spoke to him his mother tongue (not Arabic) and saved him from drowning. The next morning the Qur'an was closed and the Bible was open.

Jonathan's decision to follow Christ was not immediate. He had many questions and sought out answers from a church in his neighborhood. He placed himself under the discipleship of leaders in the church and though never thought of or aspired to leadership, is now a pastor of an ethnic congregation of BMB's. *Jonathan's* heart is for the reconciliation of Isaac and Ishmael, the brothers. He longs for the day when "Ishmael" will recognize from whence his salvation comes. He desires the unity and cohesiveness of what will exist in the "new Jerusalem." Sadly, his greatest frustration as a pastor leading out in partnership with believers from Christian background is the lack of unity. "No one cares about orthodoxy. They just want to fill the pews. We need to train and teach. We need to become more responsible... We have a feel good Christianity and we are not

speaking out against it. We must not compromise the true word of God. Look at Europe...churches are dying because they have left the true word."⁹⁵

Case Study Seven: *Harry* was a strong faithful Sunni Muslim. Though he was not from an Arab nation, he nevertheless studied and spoke Arabic and read the Qur'an easily. His first introduction to Christians was through the Qur'an. He learned that they were not trustworthy because they corrupted their books. Through the loving ministry of a teacher, *Harry* became interested in Christianity. The hymns of Christmas and Easter especially touched him. This led him to borrow a Bible. Though he was learning and attempting to follow Christ as a teenager, he kept his faith a secret until he filled out papers for higher education declaring himself a Christian.

Now years later he spends his time using technology and secular venues to reach Muslims. He laments the attitude of the North American church.

"They are not very serious about the faith...The only want to be very politically correct. I try to be sensitive and not offend as well. But it is as though we are ashamed....if everyone has the right to their own opinion, then that means it is hard to filter things out. No one is allotted to say to others 'you are wrong.' Is this freedom? Yet we are warned again the wrong kind of freedom in Romans 14. It is hard for me to hear the right voice when there are so many voices out there. It means a leader can say something and no one listens. Now bloggers are making it even worse with all of their own opinions."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ J.A., Interview by Author, May 6, 2010.

⁹⁶ H.W., Interview by Author, May 5, 2010.

Chapter 5: Implications for the North American Church

A. A New Community

Revelation 7 is a prophetic vision of multi-cultural worship. Every tribe, language and nation will be represented as they cry out words of worship and praise before the Lamb of God. The church in North America now has the opportunity to experience to some degree John's vision as she welcomes the world into her sanctuary. It is not only gateway cities where every language is heard, but small cities and towns as well. One study notes that in the past fifteen years immigrant population in non-gateway cities has increased from five to ten percent.⁹⁷ Christians in North America who desire to share faith with their immigrant friends and neighbors are learning to do so in ways outside their own context. However, once the stranger enters into the sanctuary, too often they are alienated once again, whether through negative attitudes or a simple lack of understanding. How can the church experience Revelation 7 in this *époque*?

B. Stepping into the Prophetic Vision of Cultural Diversity

The church in her earliest day struggled with the diversity that the gospel seemed to embrace. Captive to their own Jewish heritage, the disciples had not from their time with Jesus fully adapted to the inclusivity he practiced. John had broken free of numerous cultural bonds before the vision described in Revelation 7. "...there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation,

⁹⁷ Allen, 1050.

from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7: 9-10 NRSV) The good news of salvation initially clad in Jewish culture was being freed from cultural captivity and becoming "all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:19). One day every nation, tribe, people and language would be represented before the Lamb of God.

Those first believers of primarily Jewish heritage grappled with the idea of assimilation as others from Greco-roman culture began to participate in their faith community. In assimilation, the outsider must minimize their uniqueness and strive to achieve what is normal for the majority.⁹⁸ In these earliest days of the church, it was not just a case of minimizing differences; the Jewish leaders were actually requiring adherence to Jewish religious norms. Acts 10 recounts the vision of Peter as he comprehends the demolition of cultural barriers. He witnessed the Holy Spirit coming upon the uncircumcised just as the circumcised. Eventually accepting this new development in the working of the Gospel, the apostles nevertheless realized that not all behavior is cultural. Therefore, they delineated that which was truly basic and central to the message of Christ leaving the rest as cultural baggage. Acts 15 tells of the council at Jerusalem and the letter written to Gentile Christians asking them only to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. Jewish apostles and elders curbed their own desire for their culture to

⁹⁸ Pocock and Henriques, 129.

dominate and embraced the blessing of cultural diversity. To step into cultural diversity as courageously as our Jewish fathers did and become a welcoming place for the BMB, the North American church will need to foster certain characteristics which are currently anathemas to Western culture, to alter the manner in which they build community, and to seek a new approach in partnership.

1. Characteristics to Foster

Though he lances a strong call for the church to be freed from her Western captivity, in his book *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* Soong-Chan Rah acknowledges on more than one occasion that the church in the East and South is equally distinct and preferential in cultural form. Rah seems to expect the Western church to divest herself of all culture and essentially embrace and take on another. This is impossible. Moreover, it is natural for one to desire for their culture to dominate. Nevertheless, the North American church can curb the desire to dominate and become more welcoming by intentionally cultivating certain characteristics. First and foremost, she should learn, teach, and practice hospitality. Hospitality is a lost art in North America. It takes time and effort. To the North American time is money and service is commodity; but to those from other hemispheres time and service equal relationship. In Chapter Two various worldviews were contrasted between Western values and other cultures. Many of them dealt with some aspect of relationship. Hospitality is one of the strongest affirmations of relationship and constructors of community. One cannot maintain a completely individualistic perspective while regularly practicing hospitality. Hospitality, in and of itself, is a great teacher. One

learns how others think and operate and thus learns to appreciate uniqueness. One learns how to prioritize relationships over task even while involved in the task of service. The Scripture calls Christians to practice hospitality (Romans 12:13) and do so without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9). Hospitality is not a duty, but a lifestyle. This type of lifestyle is the mark of a leader (1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8). The North American church will need to recognize it as such and affirm it.

The North American church will need to re-examine the theology of guilt. Rol- and Muller points out in his book, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door*, it was not only guilt humanity experienced after the fateful event in the garden, but shame and fear as well. "When man broke God's law, he was in a position of guilt. When man broke God's relationship, he was in a position of shame. When man broke God's trust, he was in a position of fear."⁹⁹ The Western church has reduced practical theology to legality and obedience. Right is right and wrong is wrong. Even as she teaches a relationship with Jesus, the gospel of Jesus is reduced to four quick points or a few Bible verses. "Do this and you will be saved" is the beginning and end of the message. Yet, Paul tells us in his letter to the church in Rome that by trusting Jesus we will not be put to shame (Romans 10:11). Our honor and our salvation both depend on God (Psalm 62:7). On our part, honoring God and contrarily shaming God is a forgotten nuance of the relationship that has translated over into earthly relationships. Three times in Ephesians 1, Paul tells the believers that their lives are for the purpose of being to the praise of the glory of God. They are to honor God by their adoption as children

⁹⁹ Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door*, 21.

and by their living. God's plan and destiny for them is that they would be to the praise of his glory. This theology is more difficult to flesh out and live up to. North Americans would rather check off their task list of concrete ways they have done the things God has demanded. Learning to honor is not so easy, and the concept of shame is minimized. Wrestling with these concepts will beg the question, "What is truth?" We must remember that truth is a person, Jesus Christ. Within the person of Jesus, truth and humanity were reconciled.

The North American church will need to develop an orientation to otherness. This can occur through intentional training. As music changes, the church learns new music. As technology changes the church learns new technology. Now as demographics change, the church should learn what those demographics are and who they are. Urban churches have done this for decades. As the demographics around them change, they study and learn what they represent in order to minister effectively quite often drastically altering the face and the direction of the church. Today's massive migration necessitates such a learning curve. First, churches should have a basic understanding of world religions. To those welcoming the BMB, this means at the very least a basic understanding of Islam.¹⁰⁰ For those working hand in hand with the BMB, the training should be more in depth. The study other religions gives insight into our own faith. We better understand concepts such as grace, kingdom, and sacrifice. The BMB is not the only one in need of discipleship and training! There should be a basic understanding of cultural values such as collectivist versus individualistic with an ability to identi-

¹⁰⁰ See again Paul Martindale's paper for further explanation on training needed.

fy Western values as such, Western. In this way only, can the choice be made to lay aside a cultural value in order to honor another. There should be a basic understanding of what is nationalistic and what is biblical. Churches have for so long prayed, "God bless America", we have forgotten how to pray, "God bless Iraq" or Saudi Arabia or Africa, etc. Pocock and Henriques call for church leaders to sustain that which is biblical and promote God's work and the break traditions that hinder. Globalization has created an awareness of others. To exclude them or put them aside for a moment in patriotic fervor is contrary to the bonding and unity that is church. Being learners is fundamental in sharing and growing in faith with others not of our background.

Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized – whoever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ – but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all of this because of the message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it! (1 Corinthians 9: 19-23)¹⁰¹

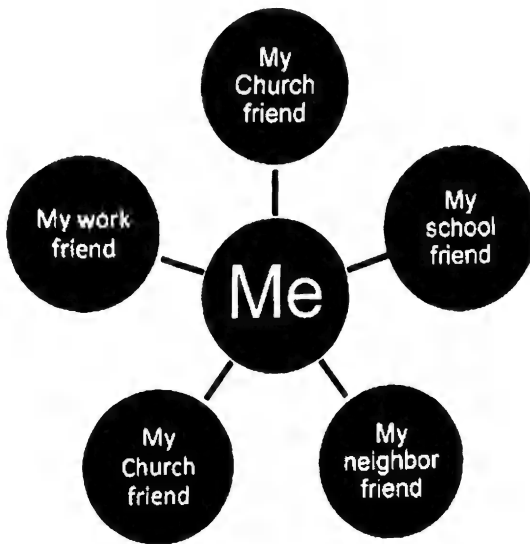
2. Building Community

Ryan Allen in his article, "The bonding and bridging roles of religious institutions for refugees in a non-gateway context," acknowledges the ability of the church to help the immigrant bridge over into the host society by meeting a variety of social needs; he notes, however, the need for bonding as well.¹⁰² The BMB

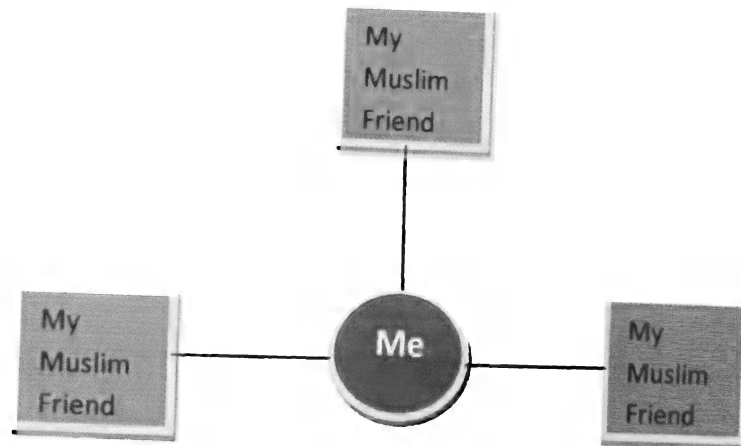
¹⁰¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002) 2078.

¹⁰² Allen, 1050-1051. Allen later notes that in non-gateway areas negative attitudes of the native born may cause the immigrant to seek out institutions where bonding can occur (1053).

has already stepped outside many cultural norms in becoming a follower of Christ. Moreover, the need for bonding is increased as the BMB is often disconnected from previous societal networks. How can the church in North America be a place of bonding, a place of community for the BMB? The following models illustrate how North Americans traditionally minister and connect, and how the church can move outside this norm and intentionally build a supportive network around the BMB. For the average North American Christian who would follow a more individualistic worldview, relationships are centered around the individual and may or may not be connected.



In sharing faith, relationships are approached in the same way. We depersonalize those we are sharing with by targeting certain people or places sharing with isolated individuals who are then connected to me.

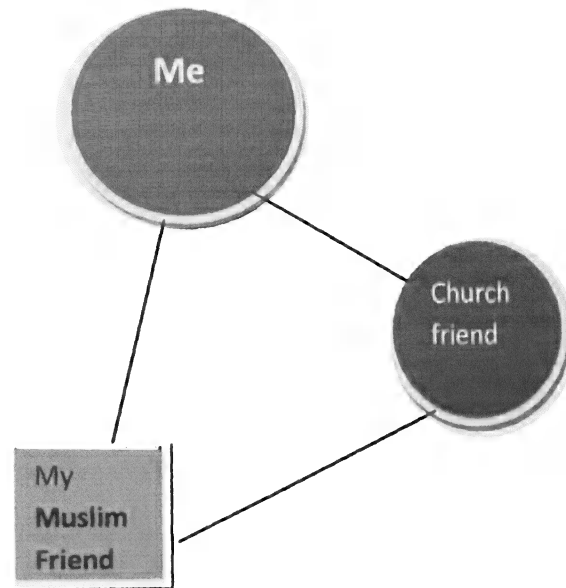


When one of our Muslim friends comes to Christ the natural inclination is plug them into our church community. Unfortunately, this rarely fits.¹⁰³

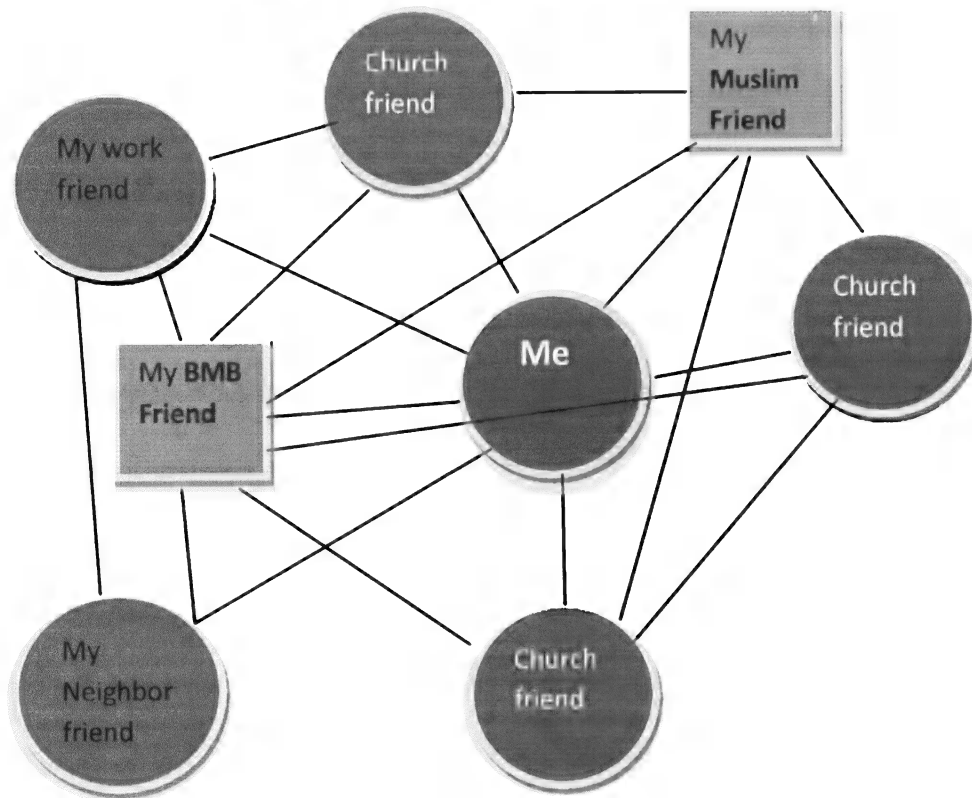


¹⁰³ This is not unlike what the first believers attempted to do in the early days of the church. As Gentiles began coming to Christ, there was an insistence that they look more Jewish in their faith.

Rather than attempting to win one in order to assimilate one into the church, connections to others should begin to be made as soon as the relationship begins.



As a BMB enters into the church community, he or she should already have a strong network of believing friends who can be trusted, are practicing cultural sensitivity and are forging bonds of friendship and support. The BMB will have believers with different gifts to invest into their spiritual growth and as other BMB's join in the fellowship; the bonds are that much stronger.



In *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities*, Greg Livingstone describes a team approach where multiple gifts are represented and multiple connected relationships are intentionally constructed in order to utilize gifts and provide support for Muslim seekers. In the model just described the North American church can utilize

the same principles to build community for the Muslim seeker or the BMB. First Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee is practicing this model, though it is happening quite naturally. A BMB with Persian connections was already a part of the church. The pastor met a young man from Iran and became his friend. He introduced him to others at church and included him in various activities having coffee and tea. The pastor began connecting him intentionally to others in the church to "share the load of witness."¹⁰⁴ Understanding the seeker's concern about losing connection with his family upon deciding to follow Christ, the pastor moved only very slowly forward building relationships with the family members so as not to alienate family members one from another. This young man is now bringing family members to the church with him. An intentional support system for this isolated believer was built and as a result the BMB and his family are moving forward in the faith journey. This model answers one of the cautions expressed by Don Little in his thesis paper "Fruitful Approaches to the Discipleship of Believers from Muslim Background. "Central to the discipleship of people belonging to the collective cultures of the Muslim world is ensuring that they develop an entirely new identity as a part of new family and community of disciples that transforms, without alienating, their relationships with their Muslim families, friends and communities."¹⁰⁵ In cases where it is possible, those walking beside a BMB will want to help them get involved with networks of BMB.¹⁰⁶

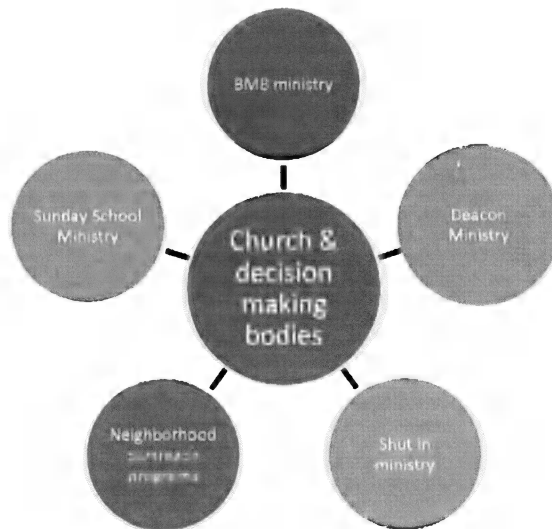
¹⁰⁴ William Shiell, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Knoxville, TN, Interview by Author, August 2, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Little, 201.

¹⁰⁶ These networks are few in number and little publicized. One that is very open and provides multiple supports for BMB is Gospel for Muslims in Dallas, Texas. <http://www.gospelformuslims.com/> The others I am personally involved with are not open and are by invitation only. While the reasons for this are un-

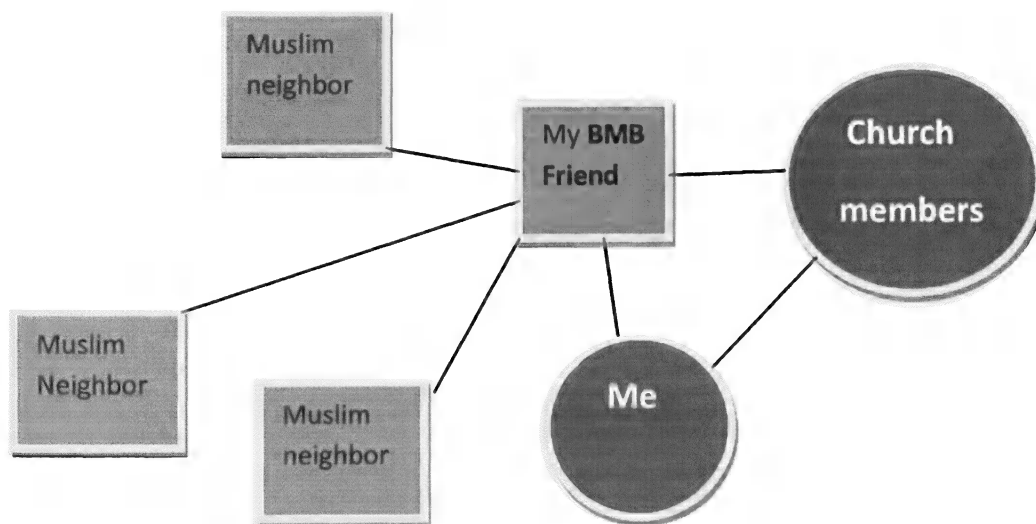
3. *New Modus Operandi*

In building community and surrounding the BMB with others who are sensitive to cultural differences, opportunities occur that might otherwise be unlikely. Often BMB's open doors into the Muslim world North Americans would not experience otherwise. This is an opportunity to undergird, support, and walk beside the BMB in ministry. Our North American way of doing ministry rarely fits with the natural way BMB's carry out their calling. North Americans tend toward structure and programs with the church at the center of the impetus as the final decision maker. The BMB must jump through hoops and understand the North American way of operating before he or she can receive the blessing of the church hierarchy. Even then it can often be very controlled and supervised indicating a superiority of the North American modus operandi. The process looks very similar to the previous one regarding individualistic versus collective network building.



derstandable, it does limit possibilities for North Americans who would be unaware of these networks to help the BMB friend connect.

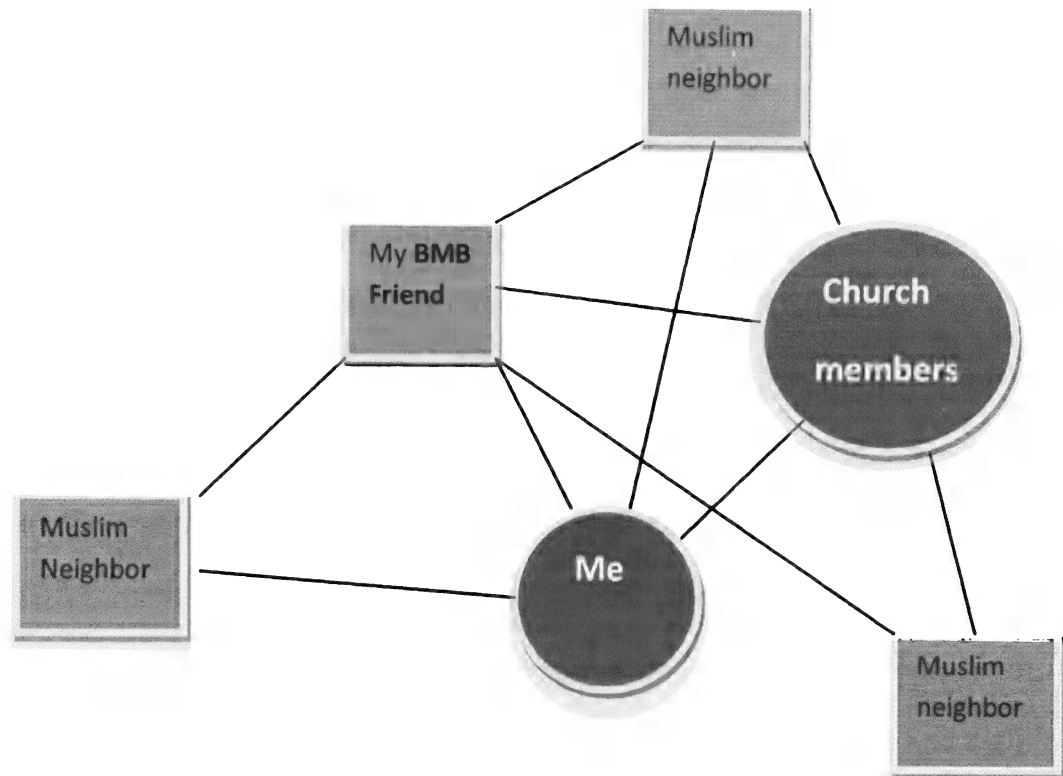
Though perhaps it is efficient, this model is not effective. The danger of the model above is we depersonalize the BMB and risk making tasks and goals the measure of success rather than relationships, not unlike many Western mission boards. "The difficult tasks of discipleship and building the body of Christ are bypassed in the name of managerial goals that seem designed to give their missionary center in the United States [*or the local church*] an aura of success."¹⁰⁷ Rather, using the scheme of a collectivist culture, the church should surround the BMB with support offering the fluidity needed in relationships and affirming an asset based approach.



As the church supports the BMB this way and as the BMB trusts the cultural sensitivity of the church, the BMB has the opportunity to build a collective network

¹⁰⁷ Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 167.

using the same model as presented earlier. This mutual accommodation (rather than on insisting on assimilation) is to the benefit of the BMB, of the church, and of the seeker.



Learning to be on mission together multi-culturally fulfills the great commission in today's globalized society. Ministry teams should reflect our globalized world if we are to avoid the same sort of paternalistic mistakes made by our missionary foreparents. "...we are a company of Christians from all over the world who now

realize that Jesus Christ is at the center of all Scripture.”¹⁰⁸ The local church in North America can and should reflect this.

4. The New Global Evangelical

The face of North America is changing. Whether the church embraces it or not, it will not hinder the advancement. Is God perhaps demanding that the church of North America re-examine who she is and what she looks like? Reflecting on the experiences encountered in globalization and in working with BMB's is an opportunity to become better theologians and to develop a more holistic faith. Intercultural work provides a deviation from the familiar which gives one the opportunity to learn most about oneself as they are faced with things that do not follow their hidden program.¹⁰⁹ We have much to learn from our BMB brothers and sisters as they do us. No one culture is all right, but neither are they all wrong. Engaging intentionally in cross-cultural relationships (whether in outreach, fellowshiping, or ministering alongside) permits North Americans a unique opening to learn about and learn from other cultures. Particularly as they walk beside their BMB brothers and sisters, they will be challenged and altered. Aspects of discipleship will not be viewed in the same way. The scriptures will take on new meanings. Relationships will develop differently. Priorities will change. Justice issues will be re-evaluated. Assets will be viewed in ways other than financial. This is not just an era for evangelism opportunities; it is an era of correction as the North American church scrutinizes that which is truth and that which is cul-

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 141.

¹⁰⁹ Seelye, 13.

ture. It is an era of humility rather than ethnocentrism as she deliberately sets aside cultural preferences in order to be church to other cultures. In all of the interviews conducted the respondents indicated that they were no longer monocultural. They changed as they engaged with North American culture. Sadly, too often, the church remained unchanged. The transformation of North American churches alongside BMB's presents the prospect of a new evangelical. The new evangelical will not throw away all natural cultural tendencies, but learn from the other culture and develop new skills and affinities. They will become global Christians ministering and operating in a global world.



C. Final Thoughts:

"And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world." (Acts

1:8)¹¹⁰ Jerusalem can now go to the ends of earth easier than ever before. William Carey wrote,

As to their distance from us, whatever objections might have been made on that account, before the invention of mariner's compass, nothing can be alleged for it, with any colour of plausibility in the present age. Men can now sail with as much certainty through the Great South Sea, as they can through the Mediterranean.¹¹¹

Technology has far surpassed the compass and thousands have gone. In the last two decades transportation has afforded the average North American Christian the privilege of participating in significant ways in mission activities outside her borders. However, no longer it is simply Jerusalem going to the ends of the earth. The ends of the earth have come to Jerusalem. God's purpose in this is that humanity would seek him and find him (Acts 17:16-27). God is found amongst his people, but a part of his church is woefully unprepared. The church in North America must learn how to interact cross-culturally in order reach out, to become a welcoming place to those who do decide to become followers, and to become effectual partners to their brothers and sisters of other cultures. Brothers and sisters of Muslim background are in an even less envious position due to current fear and mistrust of Muslims and the juxtaposition of Qur'anic teaching versus biblical. The task appears overwhelming. Training in cultural sensitivity and understanding is vital to effective interaction.

Effective interaction means giving of yourself – trying to see the world of others and respect their life ways. It means not forcing your ways on them. Yet at the same time, it means being true to yourself and your ways. To be really effective, interaction must be a two-way street or of course, it is not

¹¹⁰ Peterson, 1967.

¹¹¹ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, (<http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf>), 67.

interaction at all. That is, all interacting individuals should be doing so from a basis of awareness, understanding, and knowledge.¹¹²

Since Pentecost God has worked in and through his people. Then the Holy Spirit overcame fear, provided guidance, and enabled the early believers to be effective in culturally diverse communities.¹¹³ The same Holy Spirit that empowered the first followers is here today ready to empower North American churches to engage with her BMB brothers and sisters.

¹¹² Clarence C. Chaffee in Elmer, 171.

¹¹³ Pocock 92

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Age: 20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, over 60

Gender: M/F

You are currently living outside your country of origin? Yes/no

A follower of Christ for how many years: 1-5; 6-10; 10-15; 15-20; over 20 years

After becoming a follower of Christ, my spiritual growth occurred mainly through:

local church involvement,

personal discipleship with a Christian Background Believer,

personal discipleship with a Muslim Background Believer,

small group or network of Christian Background Believers

small group or network of Muslim Background Believers

self directed discipleship.

Describe your primary Christian community involvement:

mono-cultural community different from your culture,

mono-cultural community of primarily your culture,

multi-cultural community,

currently no Christian community involvement

Regardless of current community involvement your preference would be to be involved in a community that is:

fully of Western culture in style and language;

Western in style but in your heart language;

culturally similar to Muslim worship in style, language, dress, and customs;

prefer to remain within the Islamic community and active at the mosque as a follower of Christ.

From the following choices select the statement that is most similar to your own perspective or situation. Please choose one even if you think the two alternatives are not mutually exclusive, in other words, that both are true or possible. For many of the examples, you might also be tempted to say, "It depends" or "Both are true to some degree." Choose anyway, without thinking too much.

I am meant to take care of others needs as much as my own.

Or

I tend to make decisions based on the result I am looking for.

First and foremost comes unity; people who think of themselves first live at the expense of others.

Or

Each person must be responsible for him or herself and think of themselves first.

We exist only in relation to other people.

Or

You must be guided by what you think is right even if others don't agree with you.

Living in such a way that honors my Christian community and Christ is the most important thing I can do in my life.

Or

Realizing the guilt of my sin before God helps me to live rightly before God and with others.

When a wrong I have committed comes to light, I want to hide or escape.

Or

When a wrong I have committed comes to light, I want to confess or apologize.

While taking care of your pastor's dog, the dog runs away and you vow to be more careful the next time and you feel ashamed to see the pastor when he comes to collect the dog.

Or

While taking care of your pastor's dog, the dog runs away and you feel incompetent and irresponsible.

While painting the outside of your house a friend walks by and you stop to greet and speak with them for a bit.

Or

While painting the outside of your house a friend walks by and wave quickly and keep on working.

When someone invites me to their home, I feel honored.

Or

When someone invites me to their home, I think they are nice for inviting me.

When I need to meet with others for a specific purpose, I prefer to have some coffee or tea and visit and really get to know the person before getting on to the business at hand.

Or

When I need to meet with others for some purpose, I prefer to get to business and get the job done.

A friend has led a Bible study that you felt was not well done. She asks you what you think and you make a few kind suggestions.

Or

A friend has led a Bible study that you felt was not well done. She asks you what you think and you give her a list of ways that you think she could have done better.

I choose to surrender my will to God because he guides my destiny.

Or

My sinful nature makes it impossible for me to follow God.

I tend to be stoic accepting God's will.

OR

I tend to be proactive and seek God's forgiveness.

I study the Bible for spiritual knowledge and wisdom that will help guide my destiny.

Or

I study the Bible to learn how to love God and love my neighbor.

God has ordained certain moral absolutes that I am expected to follow.

OR

Jesus gave us an example that we should try and imitate, but it may look different for different people.

The Qur'an and the Bible are Holy Scriptures reveal by God and should not be questioned.

OR

Christians and Muslims should examine their books and determine what is true for themselves.

Regardless of all our great plans and ideas, God is righteous and will one day put humankind in its place.

OR

Because God loves humankind, his spirit is working that none should perish.

God will determine my progress and survival.

OR

I am accountable to God to make effective use of the resources He has provided.

Religious conviction orders how I live my life.

OR

I include religious practices in my daily life.

Some things are beyond my reach, no matter what I do.

Or

If I try hard enough and want something badly enough, there is nothing to stop me from getting what I want.

Choose the five that are most important to you: wisdom, loving God, mercy, independence, morality, family & friends, obeying God, Respect, forgiveness, freedom to choose

I am willing to be contacted for a personal interview: yes/no

If yes, my email contact is:

<http://www.eSurveysPro.com/Survey.aspx?id=ad3cece4-183e-4916-8554-3d29d86a2632>

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Age: 20-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, over 60

Gender: M/F

You are currently living outside your country of origin? Yes/no

A follower of Christ for how many years: 1-5; 6-10; 10-15; 15-20; over 20 years

Tell me a bit of how you came to Christ and ended up in the country where you now are.

After becoming a follower of Christ, my spiritual growth occurred mainly through:

local church involvement,

personal discipleship with a Christian Background Believer,

personal discipleship with a Muslim Background Believer,

small group or network of Christian Background Believers

small group or network of Muslim Background Believers

self directed discipleship.

Describe your primary Christian community involvement:

mono-cultural community different from your culture,

mono-cultural community of primarily your culture,

multi-cultural community,

currently no Christian community involvement

Are you content within this community? Yes/no

List three strengths and three weaknesses of this community?

If no current Christian community involvement, give at least one and not more than three reasons why not.

If your primary Christian community involvement is of a culture different from your own, name at least two and not more than five areas of cultural differences that have hindered a personal sense of belonging.

Do you serve in any sort of leadership capacity within a Christian community?

Yes/no

If yes and the community's primary culture is different from yours, name at least one and not more than three cultural challenges you have faced as a leader.

Regardless of current community involvement your preference would be to be involved in a community that is:

fully of Western culture in style and language;

Western in style but in your heart language;

culturally similar to Muslim worship in style, language, dress, and customs;

prefer to remain within the Islamic community and active at the mosque as a follower of Christ.

What would you like to add:

Appendix C: A Training Module

Helping the Church Learn to Minister in a Multicultural World

By Nell Green

Written 2004

Revised 2007 and 2010

- I. Biblical and missiological basis for multicultural outreach through the church.
 - A. The Challenge
 - B. Richard Bailey, "Who's Turning the Mission Field Upside Down?", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 37 no. 1, January 2001, pp. 50-57.
 - 1. Acts 17:26-27
 - 2. Changing paradigms in missions and implications for the Diaspora
 - C. The need to train the church
 - 1. Leviticus 19:33-34
 - 2. Acts 17:26 and implications of *kairos*
- II. Who is the Internationals Cluster of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
 - A. Mission statement
 - B. Vision statement
 - C. Website and ning network
 - D. Commitment of the Internationals Cluster to helping the church minister in a multicultural world.
- III. Suggestions for increasing multi-cultural awareness and acquisition in the local church.
 - A. Instruction in world religions and apologetics
 - 1. Identifying ethnic groups and world religions represented in the area
 - 2. Available guides
 - 3. Webinars
 - 4. Conferences
 - 5. Visits to centers of worship
 - B. Development of skills in cross-cultural sensitivity
 - 1. Craig Storti's *Figuring Foreigners Out*
 - 2. Group time and individual responsibility
 - C. Preparing workers who are engaged in cross cultural ministry
 - 1. Duane Elmer's *Cross-Cultural Connections*
 - 2. Individual responsibility and debriefing

- D. Simple exercises for raising awareness and identifying areas of possible cross cultural ministry.
- E. Prayer tools that raise awareness
- F. Use of drama and monologues to raise awareness
- G. Participating in cross cultural events and programs that highlight other cultures
- H. Hosting refugees and students
- I. Sharing holidays
 - 1. Thanksgiving
 - 2. Experience holiday of another culture
- J. Working with local agencies
- K. Use of testimonies and leaders from other cultures.
- L. International Ministry seminar
- M. Contextualizing messages
- N. Excursions
- O. Including children
 - 1. VBS
 - 2. Language Camps
- P. Use of media
- Q. Use of Social networking
- IV. A Four Year Plan
 - A. Year of Awareness
 - B. Year of Appreciation
 - C. Year of the Acquisition
 - D. Year of Activity
 - E. Use of a missions consultant
- V. Appendices
 - A. Devotionals to use on the Journey
 - B. Introduction to Chronological Storytelling
 - C. Michael Kisskalt's model: The Mission of the Church
 - D. Experiential Activities to raise cultural awareness
 - E. Resource List

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